Robin for Exalt

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Summary: Chrom sucks at his job. Robin decides its time to bring a splash of democracy to Ylisse.

Chapter 1: Chapter 1

Inspired by what John Stewart has affectionately labeled "Democalypse 2014."

Robin for Exalt

"You're the King?" I didn't vote for you."-Monty Python and the Holy Grail-

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"…What the hell is this…" *Chrom knows we're broke, right*?

"So pretty!" Lissa posed next to her likeness in gold.

"Teach always told ya; these guns are a work of art!" Vaike flexed next to his.

"Wait till Ma' sees this; you city folk sure are fancy!" Donnel was mighty impressed.

"…This seems like a colossal waste of money…" Gaius spoke sense.

"Milord insisted that no expense be spared in honoring our war heroes," Frederick didn't really *NEED a* 10 foot tall, solid-gold statue of himself on public display to feel honored. But it was a nice thing to have.

"Annddddd now I have to explain to the Fletchers Guild why we haven't settled our war debt, but have enough gold to buy 10 thousand longbows decorating King's Plaza. That's totally what I wanted to do today…"

House Ylisse had accumulated an astronomical sum of debts between the campaigns in Plegia and Valm; that was the plain truth of the matter. The farmers hadn't been paid for stocking marching rations. The stonemasons hadn't been paid for rebuilding the border forts. The apothecaries hadn't been paid for treating wounded veterans. There were shipping costs from the landing in Valm Harbor and excise fees from importing Feroxi Steel and road-building expenditures from Awakened Grima quaking the old highways.

There were job shortages. (Trade guilds waiting on payment from the crown were sitting on their assets instead of taking on new apprentices.)

There were bread lines. (Chrom's pronouncement that no merchant may charge more than 2 farthings per loaf so that all men could eat had induced merchants to stock fewer loaves. Which in turn had induced farmers to grow less grain.)

Ylisstol was overcrowded and disease-ridden and reeked of feces. (Chrom had opened the royal city to every orphan and war refugee without any thought as to the burdens of human traffic or the limits of city infrastructure. When the sewers started backing up, Robin finally convinced him that they had a problem.)

Chrom was a good man and a noble warrior. But he was a terrible, terrible king.

"Did you like the new war memorial?"

"You're an idiot." Robin berated the Exalt.

"It wasn't THAT expensive."

"Do I need to run down the list of things you should have been doing with all that gold before arts-and-crafts projects?"

"I took out a loan from Chon'sin. We'll have our debts paid off by years end."

"Loans ARE debt."

"Right; but now we owe all our debts to just one lender." Chrom explained himself. "They won't call it in all at once, we can service it down, and we don't have to make our first payment for five years. We don't even have to pay for all of it."

"What do you mean *we don't have to pay for all of it*? Of course we have to pay for it."

"We borrowed 50 million gold and only have to pay back 45 million; Chon'sin takes 10 percent of the interest. They wanted 5 percent; but I negotiated it up to 10."

"Are you fucking serious right now?" Robin gaped.

"Pretty good, right?" Chrom beamed.

"DUMBASS! interest is what they charge you every year on top of what you haven't paid yet!"

"Wait; Really? So then 10 percent means…"

"…in five years, you owe Chon'sin ***80 million*** gold!"

"…Oh…shit…" Chrom felt foolish. "That's not nearly as good."

"Ya Think!?"

"It okay. I can fix this. I just need to find Say'ri and…"

"I'LL find Say'ri and explain that the King of Ylisse doesn't know how loans work." Robin took charge before Chrom blundered further. "You…go play with Falchion or something…"

By day's end Robin had refinanced Chrom's loan down to 3 percent, procured a waiver of liabilities from the mayor of Southtown, and worked out a trade agreement by which the Fisherman's Guild would sell to Port Ferox at a discount rate in exchange for an offset against the cost of steel.

"With this arrangement we get the guild hiring again, decrease our reconstruction costs…CHROM! PAY ATTENTION!" Robin gave her report. Or at least tried. When it came to matters of state, Chrom had the attention span of a goldfish.

"Gods Robin; you know I don't understand any of this." The Exalt yawned.

"Remind me why you're King again?"

"Ummmmm…lets see….my father was a King. His father was a King. His father was a King…"

"That's stupid. You're stupid. Picking leaders by bloodline is STUPID!" Robin could name dozens of scholars and sages and scribes who hadn't been fortunate enough to have been sired by royalty, and were more competent to sit a throne than Chrom or Lissa or Lucina. Or—gods forbid—Cynthia (Ylisse's next head-of-state by operation of law if Lucina predeceased her without heir...that thought was absolutley horrifying).

"Look; I'm not going to pretend it makes sense. It is what it is; just give me the papers and I'll put my seal to them."

"Don't just put your seal to it; READ FIRST!"

"These trade agreements are…like…200 pages long. No one actually reads these."

"Your word can change laws and move armies. You should be reading EVERYTHING you put your name to."

"I would. But its late, and Sumia's been super horny all day, and I really don't want to..." without further review—errr; any review—Chrom affixed his seal.

"You could have just signed a decree changing the title of *Exalt* to *Supreme Master Big Nuts*, and you wouldn't even know."

"You seem to have everything in order. I trust you!" Chrom left Robin the work of filing and promulgating his decrees, and hastily retired to have dirty, dirty sex with his smoking hawt wife.

"I do all the work around here. I practically run this country. I should be Exalt." Robin recorded the date of affixing in the king's registrar and drafted a certification.

And then a most wicked thought occurred to her.

I SHOULD be Exalt.

"…What the hell is this…" *Robin knows you can't be exalt unless you're royalty, right?*

"VOTE ROBIN!" Gaius harassed random pedestrians with campaign literature and a rouge's tongue. "You there; what a sweet child you have. Does he want a free lollipop. Here's a free lolipop. VOTE ROBIN! You there; gentleman of exceptionally good taste in the stunning hat. Do you know how stylish you look? VOTE ROBIN!"

"You. Peasant boy. How would you like to pay lower taxes AND make more money!" Maribelle sold her pitch.

"My brother's a dork; vote for Robin!"

"LISSA!" Chrom was pissed.

"What; they were giving away free lollipops. You don't give away free lollipops" Lissa pouted.

"What is the meaning of this!?"

"I'm running against you for the title of Exalt, dweeb." Robin called out.

"You can't do that!"

"Oh yes I can! Exalt is an elected office now."

"Since when!?"

"Since you signed *An Order by Exalt Chrom abolishing throne rights by blood and providing for appointment by Popular Election*, because YOU DON'T READ!" Robin produced proof of filing.

"…the fuck is a *Popular Erection?* That sounds like something Vaike gets."

"***ELECTION!*** Its when people vote who they want to run the country and put the winner in charge. You're a king; why don't you not know this?"

"So we're going to appeal to the peasants and bumpkins and pick a ruler based on who they like more?"

"Yes."

"That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard."

"Its not dumber than picking a ruler based on who got squirted out of a dead exalts balls in what order!"

"...Its way dumber than that..."

"You're just afraid I'll beat you."

"YOU? Beat ME?" Chrom guffawed. "I'm THE EXALT!"

"You SUCK at your job!"

"No…seriously Robin…the people love me. And Sumia. And most of them still think that you're some kind of demonspawn. There is no way you could ever get more votes then me."

"PROVE IT!"

"FINE; I WILL! GODS!"

"IT'S ON!"

"IT'S SO ON!"

-Cast Your Vote- (Of course the first year I vote Democrat is the year Republicans retake the Senate)

Chapter 2: Chapter 2

The responses to Chapter 1 were just fantastic; thank you everyone who followed and left a review! For fics like this, feedback is what really gets the creative juices flowing.

I got several requests to bring Lucina on board. I'm issuing an executive veto on the "make her Robin's waifu" proposal. But I like where your heads are at, and I'm definitely going to play off of that idea.

We'll see if any of those votes change as the campaign progresses. (Chrom for all his faults is a good and honest man. Robin doesn't play fair.)

Robin for Exalt

"**Do you still believe that good soldiers make good kings?"** -Renly Baratheon; A Game of Throne-

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"Why are you doing this?" Sumia shook her head. Her husband could be so damn stubborn sometimes.

"She thinks that if we put it to a vote, the people of Ylisse wouldn't want me to be their Exalt! Wouldn't want ME to be their Exalt! How ridiculous is that!?"

"Go to the hierarchs. Tell them you never heard of this law. Decree blood rights again."

"NO! I'm gonna run against her, and I'm gonna win!"

"...That's…" *Oh Dear. How to tell him.* "…why don't you go to the hierarchs, just to be safe…"

You don't think I'd win!?"

"I think that getting into a battle of wits with Robin is a really bad idea. Robin doesn't lose...she's tricky..."

"Robin can play all the tricks she wants; I'm a beloved ruler! My people adore me!"

"Dire news Your Grace...it appears you are unpopular..." Fredrick produced Chrom's favorability ratings. "There were… reviews..."

"Me? Unpopular? That can't be right."

"Gaurdian Mikey writes: "***Chrom is a terrible king***." Frederick reported. DerpyOtaku writes: ***I aways wonder how Chrom manages to get by conisdering he's so daft***. Dark Mephiles writes: ***I'm voting Chrom, just because I want to se how much he's going to screw up.***"

"BASTARDS! I killed Grima and saved the world for these people; Why don't they love me!?" Chrom needed to get popular again.

"You did that *years* ago." Sumia reminded him. "Now there's no jobs, mountains of debt, and King's Plaza smells like a chamberpot. What have you done for them lately?"

"Might I suggest addressing the sewage problem first, Your Grace," Frederick advised. "I do believe people would like you more if the capital DIDN'T smell like a chamberpot."

"It couldn't hurt,"Sumia agreed.

"Very well; we shall fix the sewers!" Chrom decided. "Builders. We need builders. All I need to do is get some men from the Masons Guild and…FUCK…I don't have any money…"

"Perhaps you could melt down my statue for coin?" Frederick was just full of helpful hints today.

"NO! We're keeping the statues! Sumia's got some old jewelery I can sell."

"I hope you don't run The Treasury like this," Sumia disapproved.

"Robin runs The Treasury," Chrom admitted.

"What exactly do you do?" Sumia had been wondering for quite some time.

"I sign the papers."

"…Sighhh…Oh boy…you're lucky you're cute."

Sumia shooed Frederick out of the room and did lewd things to her stupid, stubborn man.

"Why are you doing this?" Lucina shook her head. Robin could be so damn stubborn sometimes.

"Lucina; your father is an amazing man and I love him to death. But he doesn't know public policy from a hole in his ass."

"Help him then! Don't steal his throne!" *MY throne. I'm next in line, bitch.*

"Hey, Hey. I'm not STEALING it. We're letting the people choose, and if they just so happen to want me…"

"I could run against you." Lucina glared.

"You could," Robin agreed. "And then you and Chrom would split the Loyalist vote, and I would win by a landslide."

"Okay...that right there…that's why you can't do this." Lucina pressed. "You're WAY too smart to be campaigning against Father. This isn't even fair."

"Doesn't Ylisse DESERVE a smart leader?" Robin pressed right back. "Mikolos VII started a war over who loves God the right way. Emmeryn threw herself off a cliff. I'm pretty sure Chrom is legally retarded…"

"WHAT ABOUT ME? I would be a good Exalt!"

"…I've thought about that, and there's a way you can stay in power even without rule of blood-right.

"How?"

"Marry me." Robin proposed.

"Stop that," Lucina went red in the face. "We're both women."

"Two women can get married now."

"Since when?"

"Since Chrom signed *An Order Allowing for Marriages of the Same Sex*. Do you have any idea how many laws I change when Chrom isn't paying attention? I drafted an order changing Ylisse's national anthem to Bohemian Rhapsody, and he signed it. HE SIGNED IT!"

"…you changed the law of marriage just to prove you could…"

"*Noooooooo*; I changed the national anthem just to prove I could. I changed the law of marriage because I wanted to."

"Whatever…I'm not marrying you…" Lucina snorted. "I'm not even attracted to girls."

"Right. But what if you just *pretend* you are. For politics. Crack a history book; it wouldn't even be close to the weirdest thing anyone's ever done to sit a throne."

"***NO!***" Lucina flat-out refused. "And I know the only reason you're even asking is because you think marrying into the royal family will boost your campaign."

"*Finnnnneee*," Robin admitted defeat and fell back to Plan B. "Where's your crazy cousin?"

"You want me to do WHAT!?" Owain knew Robin was tricky. He didn't think she was *THAT* tricky.

"Marry me, darling. I love you ever so much."

"…this is the first time you've ever SPOKEN to me…"

"And we already we have this amazing connection. Isn't it magical?" Robin batted her eyelashes and struck her most flirty tone. "Its like we were meant to be."

"Stop. You're a terrible actor."

"But you're an AMAZING actor. Which is why we can make this work!" Robin saw Owain was in no mood to be jerked around and spoke plainly. "You're a showman. Elections are show business. Just think what a thespian of your talents could do on the campaign trail; you couldn't ASK for a better stage!"

"So our marriage would be an ACT?" Owain considered.

"A magnificent act."

"What about sex?"

"What about it?"

"Do we…do we sleep together?"

"No…I'm going to marry into the Exalted Bloodline and not make a royal baby…" Robin snarked. "OF COURSE WE SLEEP TOGETHER!"

"That doesn't sound like acting."

"Why are you being so difficult? A beautiful woman is throwing herself at you; what are you, gelded?"

"…I was kind of hoping I could work things out with Severa..."

"Severa hates you. And really now; Severa? Over THIS!?" Robin loosened her robes and showed a little skin.

"…Oh WOW…those are nice…"

"I know; right!?" Robin giggled and bounced. "And they're 100 percent natural. Go ahead; give them a feel if you don't believe me."

"Annnddddd this decision just got a whole lot easier!" Owain took her ring, kneeled,and said: "Lovely Lady Robin; will you fake-marry me for sex, power, and the lulz?"

"With a proposal like that, how can I refuse?" Robin accepted her ring back and curtsied graciously. "Shall we introduce the kingdom to your blushing bride?"

"Can we make out first?"

"...settle down Owain…"

"There; all fixed!" Chrom took a deep breath. Ylisstol smelled like fresh air again.

"…that'll be 14,000 gold…" the master builder charged.

"Will you accept payment in the form of diamond rings?"

"Gold." The builder insisted.

"I will give you 20,000 gold worth of jewelery if you accept payment in the form of diamond rings."

"24,000."

"22,000."

"Deal." The Guildwright and the Exalt came to an agreement.

"Well done!" Frederick applauded the achievement.

"If you sell my hairpins to pay for the new highway, you're sleeping on the couch." Sumia glowered.

"Maybe Robin is on to something with this whole election thing." Lissa teased.

"Whats that supposed to mean!?" Chrom took the bait.

"Nothing…just that since you started thinking people could boot you out of power for doing a shit job, you've become a much more attentive king." Lissa had been complaining about the raw sewage problem for weeks. Those sewers never would have gotten fixed if Chrom hadn't been feeling the pressure.

"I admit…its not as dumb as I first thought…" Chrom was warming up to the idea of running for office. He still had it in him to be a dashing prince charming, when he put his mind to it. Getting out and reminding the people why they loved their Exalt might be just what he needed to snap Ylisse out of its reconstruction malaise. "Frederick; you worship the ground I walk on. What is it about my royal personage that strikes you as most impressive?"

"That would be your honor and prowess on the battlefield, Your Grace," Frederick answered readily. "Your justice is merciful and strong."

"And you, Sumia. Why do you love me?"

"Because you're a a good man. And a sexy beast."

"And you, Lissa?"

"Because you're my loveable, doofus brother."

"There it is! I'm a loveable, sexy, war hero with a heart of gold! I just have to get out and remind everyone; if people see me fight they'll remember why they love me!" Chrom had a game plan, and he didn't need Robin to make it work."FREDERICK; saddle my horse! WE RIDE!"

"AT ONCE!" Frederick boomed. *There's the man I would follow to the gates of hell. Welcome back, Captain.*

Chapter 3: Chapter 3

Thank you again to everyone who responded with interest in this fic. One thing I never see in fanfiction (and always wanted to bring to it) was political satire. I tried to do this once before in a now-deleted fic for another fandom, and made a horrid mess of it. Now I feel like I'm doing it right.

Some of you want to know what's going on with Morgan. Robin is unwed as of the post-war start of this story, which means future Morgan does not exist in this timeline. Morgan, if he appears at all, will be appearing as a royal fetus.

With regards to everyone being out of character; imagine how these characters would act if portrayed in a Will Ferrell movie, and you will find that they are all very much in character.

Robin For Exalt

"Democracy is a device that insures that we shall be governed no better than we deserve. Whose fault is it?" -Adlai Stevenson-

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"AVAST, YE SCURVY DOGS!" The dread pirate Zanth and his scoundrel crew made landfall at Bay Breeze Pier. Raiding up and down the southern coast of Ylisse had become much easier since Ylisstol had cut defense spending in half; what with King Chrom the Frivolous emptying the royal coffers.

"PIRATES!" villagers boarded up their houses and rang out their call-to-arms and rallied their militias.

"Up and at em; Show em how ye bury yer treasure lads!" Zanth's raiding party torched the docks and looted their way through the fish markets and broke upon the town square in a screaming horde of rape and butchery.

"YARRR; That be the finest pirate's booty I've ever laid eyes on!" Bunghole Jones wasn't talking about treasure.

"Back ye bilge rat; I saw her first!" One-Eye Willy swung his axe menacingly.

"Swash yer own bucklers One-Eye." Bunghole cracked him across the forehead.

"Sheath yer own cutlass, Bunghole!"One-Eye cracked back twice as hard.

"Smartly, lads! The secret to a good raping be in findin' the right chord to strike fear and nausea into yer enemy; this be a fool's motley!" Captain Zanth took charge. "Bunghole; back to the ship with ye. Ye be demoted to barnacle-scraper, second class. One-Eye; put the bird down and let me have a few words with ye."

But there were no words to be had. For at that very moment a javelin pierced ol' One-Eye through his one eye, and he dropped dead on the spot.

"**WHO HAS THE BALLS!?"** Captain Zanth bellowed.

"Hah Hah!" A lone rider in extravagant, enameled armor met the pirate horde and laughed a heroic laugh. "Prepare to face…wait Frederick, is everyone watching?" The rider paused to make sure his cape was fluttering majestically.

"The whole village, milord." A second rider answered.

"Prepare to face the King's ***JUSTIIIICCCCEEEE***!"

"…And that's how I'm going to create jobs, fix the roads, AND pay off the war debt without raising taxes." Robin concluded her campaign speech. "I will now take questions. You there…gentleman in the front…"

"Aren't you Plegian?"

"I am a loyal citizen of Ylisse and I've fought for the Halidom in two wars. Next question…you, with the baby…"

"You WERE born in Plegia, were you not?"

"…I hardly see how that's…"

"Terrorist!"

"Commie!"

"SHOW US THE BIRTH CERTIFICATE!"

"Does anyone have any questions about my ***policies***?" Robin tried her best to ignore the hecklers. This was going to be harder than she thought. "…You…woman in the floral dress…"

"Chrom fixed the sewers."

"…That isn't a question…" *Gods; these people DESERVE Chrom*.

"Why shouldn't we just give him more time to fix everything else?"

"First of all, he only fixed the sewers when and because I announced my candidacy against him. He could have fixed it months ago and he didn't; now he's just pandering. Second, he spent 22,000 gold worth of royal assets to do it. He could have gotten it done for 14,000 with the gold he wasted on the War Memorial and had enough leftover to fix the roads. Third…"

"**LONG LIVE THE KING! LONG LIVE THE KING! LONG LIVE THE KING!"**

A boisterous flash mob of small-town folk marched into Ylisstol carrying a most exalted Chrom upon their shoulders, mosh-pit style.

"Exalt Chrom rode to Bay Breeze Square and thrashed 100 pirates by his lonesome; it was the most heroic thing I've ever seen!" A girl in the mob swooned.

"Slew the Southern Sea King and took his head, his lordliness did! A fine man our Exalt!" a yokel farmhand gushed Chrom's praise in his hillbilly dialect.

"He even met the boys at the tavern afterwards for a pint; sparred with some of the youths and danced with me daughter. A real man of the people!" Added another.

"He's got my vote!" Added a third.

"A man who can champion us when we need a champion and who you can drink a beer with; he should be our king!" Added one more.

"**LONG LIVE THE KING! LONG LIVE THE KING! LONG LIVE THE KING!"** The crowd that had gathered around Robin abandoned her, and joined with Chrom's adoring throng.

"NO! He's just fixing now what he should have fixed 3 years ago. Every pillaged town and ravaged villager is a badge of his neglect; ***Don't you people get it***!?" Robin lost her cool.

"…Easy now…" Owain put a hand on her shoulder and calmed her down before she said something campaign-ending. "Chrom has won the day. You're only going to make it worse."

"SEE THE FATE OF THOSE WHO WOULD RAVAGE THE HALIDOM AT THE HANDS OF THY EXALT; CHROM LOVES YOU ALL!" Frederick produced the head of the Dread Pirate Zanth mounted on a javelin. "IT IS IN THIS LOVE THAT HE RIDES DOWN YOUR RAVAGERS AND STRIKES AGAINST THEM WITH HIS OWN BODY! PRAISE EXALT CHROM; LONG MAY HE REIGN!"

"**LONG LIVE THE KING! LONG LIVE THE KING! LONG LIVE THE KING!"**

"Citizens of the Halidom!" King Chrom addressed his people. "I can hear you! The World hears you! The ruffians who burnt those villages will hear all of us soon!"

The people cheered. Oh how mightily the people cheered.

"Today, Ylisse, I can tell you two things: THE SOUTHERN SEA KING IS DEAD, AND THE FISHERMAN'S GUILD IS ALIVE!"

"**LONG LIVE THE KING! LONG LIVE THE KING! LONG LIVE THE KING!"**

"The Fisherman's Guild is alive because of *MY TRADE AGREEMENT*, you *BASTARD!*" Robin shouted. But no one heard.

"I pledge that as long as I reign you do not have to live in fear of brigands, pirates, conquerors, or ***Plegians.***"

The way Chrom threw out the last word, Robin could have sworn he was talking about her.

"Chrom…is actually good at this…" Owain gaped.

"He's just slightly better at running a competitive campaign than I expected," Robin half-admitted. "These voters are so STUPID! Stupid attracts stupid. How am I suppose to compete with that?"

"You would probably attract more voters if you didn't so openly despise them," Owain suggested.

"I don't OPENLY despise them." Robin denied.

"You are a terrible actor," Owain reminded her. "We poll-tested your negatives. Do you know the number one reason why voters don't like you?"

"They say I'm a Plegian, Terrorist, Commie Antichrist?" Robin ventured a guess.

"No. They say you're a snobby, know-it-all, elitist who talks down to people who aren't as smart as you."

"…Ouch…." That stung.

"You have an image problem." Owain diagnosed the issue. "Chrom fixed his image problem. We need to fix yours. The way I see it, we have two options."

"And what would those be?" *I knew I married you for a reason. There it is…*

"The first option is we train you to present better in front of voters. But I don't think we can do this, because you are a *terrible actor*."

"…Try Me…" Robin challenged.

"Alright. I'm a villager who thinks Chrom would make a better exalt than you…" Owain got into character. "*I say; Chrom is a fine Exalt! Why ever should we replace him with you?"*

"Because Chrom bankrupted Ylisse by lowering taxes in the middle of a war, and now the country is falling apart because he doesn't know how to manage debt. I have a six point plan that will…"

"…*but he's the rightful king. Why don't you just serve as chancellor of the king's court and tell him the six point plan; isn't that the way it's supposed to be*?"

"Don't you think it would be *BETTER* if the one in charge was the one with the better ideas on how to run the country?"

"*But its TRADITION! We've never voted for a king before."*

"And no one built a castle before…until the first time someone built a castle. Just because it's new, doesn't mean it's bad."

"*Tradition is important to me! I am shocked and offended that you would say such a thing!*"

"YOUR TRADITION DOESN'T MAKE SENSE! THERE'S NO REASON FOR IT!"

"…"

"…"

"…"

"…Okay…so I can't pretend that stupid people don't annoy me…" Robin conceded. "What's option number two?"

"We find an even more out of touch know-it-all to make you look better by comparison."

"Where are we going to find one of those?"

"You want me to do WHAT!?" Miriel reacted not unlike Owain when Robin had first proposed fake-marriage.

"Run for Exalt as a third party reform candidate," Robin didn't think it would take much convincing to get her into the race.

"We were just thinking; the people should have the pick of the most learned and capable minds in the realm when they make their choice." Owain flattered her. "It would be a *shame* if such a great thinker were to be absent from the arena of ideas."

"...It is true that the quantitative arts are most applicable to methods of governing…" Miriel considered. "The country would benefit immeasurably from my political and scientific acumen."

"Exactly! That's what we're saying!" Robin led her on.

"Perchance would you be urging this because you believe that by having a more intellectual candidate enter the race, you can triangulate between that candidate and Chrom to attract centrist voters who favor a balance of headiness and machismo?"

"Gods NO…of course not…that would be SO underhanded…"

"Regardless; I do believe I can do some good in this so-called arena of ideas. I'll do it."Miriel decided. "With my level of education and sociological awareness, convincing these troglodytes that I can best represent their interests should be as simple as linear regression."

"When you announce your candidacy, tell the people what you just said exactly the way you just told us." Robin advised.

Cast Your Vote! (Let's pretend for a moment that 3rd parties matter)

Chapter 4: Chapter 4

Whats with all the votes for Kellam? You people and your love of invisible knights...

Robin For Exalt

"I did not have sexual relations with that woman." -Bill Clinton-

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"Robin's jumped 15 points since Miriel threw her hat in the race." Chrom puzzled over the latest tracking polls. (Miriel has invented the tracking poll)

"…I don't get it…" Lucina remembered what Robin had told her when she threatened to run. *You and Chrom split the loyalist vote, and I win by a landslide.* "Robin is a know-it-all policy wonk. Miriel is a know-it-all policy wonk. She should be siphoning off her base."

"Miriel is only at 7 percent." Sumia read the polls. "Even if EVERY vote in her corner came out of Chrom's support, that still doesn't cover the jump."

"Why?" Chrom asked.

"It means that Robin isn't just pulling ahead because Miriel's taking your votes. Robin herself is becoming more popular."

"But WHY?"

"...I haven't the foggiest idea..."

"Here it is." Lucina found the answer. "Look at the character fitness ratings; 30 percent of voters say Robin is too snobby to relate to the common man. Last week it was 60 percent..."

"…and that's Miriel's rating now..." Sumia saw the trick.

"Lucina; what is the number one reason why voters don't like me?" Chrom saw how to play a trick of his own.

"They say that you're too much of a meathead to sit the throne," Lucina read.

"…it does not say *meathead…"*

"…it actually says meathead…"

"What does that even mean?"

"It means they think you're a dumb jock." Sumia interjected and informed her lord husband.

"A dumb jock compared to Miriel or Robin, perhaps. What if there were an even BIGGER meathead in the race?"

"Where are we going to find one of those?" Lucina asked.

"IT'S VAIKE TIME!" Everyone's favorite axe-man declared his candidacy. (Chrom sent him off to his campaigning with a whisper of "*Remember; you're just supposed to make me look good.")*

"Oh dear god, what have I done?" It suddenly occurred to Robin that if Ylisse's experiment in democracy went horribly wrong, it was all on her. *Exalt Vaike? Oh HELL no.*

"Now, ol' Teach ain't exactly the thinkin' type. I'm a simple man with simple needs. But Teach thinks the fancy folk in their castles do too much. A fisherman knows how to fish. A farmer knows how to farm. EXALTS don't know how to fish or farm. So why do EXALTS get to tell you how to do it? What's up with that!?"

"Yeah! What's up with that!?" a disgruntled farmer repeated.

"WHAT'S UP WITH THAT!?" shouted another.

…Oh NO…he's using populism! Robin mentally kicked herself.

"Here's what ol' Teach is gonna do for you! Teach is going to get rid of taxes. We don't need more taxes; we need less nobles! Exalt Teach is gonna do less, spend less, and let you keep more of your own money!"

"**MORE MONEY!LESS NOBLES! MORE MONEY! LESS NOBLES!"**

"You can't lower taxes because then we can't pay off Chrom's debts!" Robin shouted over the din of the crowd.

"…you also said you were going to cut their taxes…" Owain reminded her.

"This idiot's actually going to do it!" Robin did not detect a hint of falsehood in Vaike's pronouncement. "More importantly; people BELIEVE he's going to do it. He's going to win."

"Not necessarily," Miriel had answers. "I've developed a statistical package for the social sciences which quantifies the mood of the electorate by issue, region, gender, age bracket, and social status. It can compute with mathematical certainty which appeals will move which voters, and run permutations for every combination of appeals yielding a winning coalition."

"This isn't a problem you can solve with math." Robin brooded.

"Of course it is." Miriel insisted.

"Then why are you in last place. KELLAM got more votes than you, and he isn't even running."

"I have no interest in running a country. I only agreed to this mummer's farce to test my theory, which so far has predicted every tracking poll with perfect accuracy." Miriel wasn't really running for exalt in earnest. She was studying the process of running for exalt. "You should know; the boost you got from my entrance into the race is about to end."

"You don't need a mathematical formula to figure that out," Robin fully expected to be in third place by week's end if she didn't correct course. "There's two testosterone filled meatheads in the race now Owain; we'll go for women's issues. If we get 50 percent of the women's vote and Chrom and Vaike each get 25, and they split the men's vote evenly, I can get 20 percent of men and still win."

"Regional factors will supersede the gender factor," Miriel predicted. "The election will be decided by an urban-agrarian split in the electorate. Chrom is strong in the cities and townships. You win if you carry the rural vote and lose if it goes to Vaike."

Vaike at that moment was winning over farmers.

"What do your math say about rural voters?" Robin picked Miriel's brain.

"Socially conservative; distrustful of nobles; value frugality and work ethic; unresponsive to abstractions and institutionalist arguments; populist in their political leanings; best spoken to plainly." Miriel ran don her list of findings.

"Plainly, huh?" Robin had a thought. "Owain; do whatever you have to do to bring your dad on board. He's going to be our bumpkin surrogate."

"…That's going to be a problem…" Owain didn't think that was fair to Donnel. "Mother is supporting uncle Chrom. Father has to keep her happy."

"I don't care what alternate timeline future debt you need to call in to make Donny work for us. You make Donny work for us."

"…But mother will…"

"Your job is to keep YOUR wife happy." Robin did sexy things to the boy, and Owain did as he was told without further talk of Lissa.

Donnel, as it turned out, was the best surrogate a campaign could ask for. People didn't have a bad thing to say about him. No matter what he said, he sounded excited and authentic. He spoke plainly and common folk connected with him.

And on top of it all, he was Chrom's brother-in-law.

"Shucks folks; you couldn't ask for a sweeter Exalt then Robin!" he would tell the yokels. "Yeah; she acts all high-and-mighty. But if you were as sharp as this 'purdy lady, you'd actin' all high-and-mighty too! Robin knows what Chrom's been doing wrong and knows how to fix it!"

"HOW THE HELL AM I IN THIRD!?" Chrom flung his poll numbers.

"Vaike and Robin have been barn-storming hard. You have no base of appeal in the farmlands." Frederick informed him.

"Get Donny!"

"Donny is already campaigning for Robin." Lissa glowered.

"GAHHHHH!" *This is bad.* "Frederick; fetch me a notary."

"At once!"

"What are you going to do?" Lissa asked.

"I'm going to repeal the bread laws. And I shall decree that farmsteads may pay their taxes in the form of excess crop. Moreover, the crown shall deem sums paid in the form of grain to be greater than their cash equivalent in gold." Chrom didn't need surrogates to do his pandering. He could make bullshit laws.

"Won't that mean we have even less money?" Lissa questioned him.

"Less taxes but more exports…it will all balance out…" Chrom assured, with absolutely no credibility.

"Well at least Donny will be happy to know you're lifting the bread laws. His family HATED those." Lissa wrinkled her nose. Every visit to her husband's village had been a flurry of *When is your idiot brother going to stop with the price controls?*

"And I should think a personal visit from the queen would inspire the devotion of many a farmhand. Dispatch Sumia, that she might light a great fire in their hearts with her love of her exalt and peerless beauty!"

"Dispatching the queen is king's work," returned Frederick advised. (Sumia didn't take kindly to being bossed around like she was still just a common Shepherd)

"…so it is…" Chrom notarized his decree and went about the business of finding his wife. He found her talking with Cordelia. Whatever they were talking about must have been scandalous, from the look on both their faces. Cordelia went beet-red and muttered something unintelligible and hastily removed herself at the sight of him.

"What's this about?" Chrom asked of his wife.

"…you are not going to believe what I just heard…"

"And that's why Ylisse needs a woman's touch. Remember ladies; when you cast your vote, say NO to patriarchy! Our voice matters; out of the homes and into the streets!" Robin pandered. *They want drek. I'll give them drek.*

"Here's a woman who didn't get ahead by marrying up!" Owain worked the crowd and took a thinly veiled swipe at the queen. "Everything Robin has is the result of hard work and talent; isn't that the kind of role model we want for our girls?"

Owain and Robin kissed convincingly enough to sell the image of a happy, wholesome marriage and spoke of the importance of family values.

"Nailed it!" Owain applauded the second they were out of the public spotlight. "You're getting better at this. Did you see the look on their faces when we kissed?"

"We've got all our bases covered now. I underestimated Chrom and ran a sloppy campaign in the beginning. That won't happen again." Robin had taken the lead and she intended to keep it. "We've got farmers, women, and values voters; if we hold that coalition we can't lose. All we have to do is work Chrom's negatives, keep our image control tight, and not get bogged down in any corruption investigations or sex scandals…"

"**YOU!"** Severa stormed into Robin campaign headquarters and angrily assailed Owain.

"Owww!"Owain bled from a gash in the head where Severa threw a shoe at him. "What was that for!?"

"**I'm pregnant, asshole!"**

Chapter 5: Chapter 5

Most of you are still voting for Robin. How sleazy does she have to get before this is no longer the case? Lets find out…

Robin For Exalt

"**How do you know if a politician is lying? His lips are moving."** –Unknown-

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"YOU'RE STILL SLEEPING WITH SEVERA!?" It was Robin's turn to throw things now.

"…In my defense…you made it very clear our marriage was a sham…" Owain ducked and dodged a tea kettle.

"IT HAS TO LOOK REAL! IF YOU'RE BALLS DEEP IN EX-GIRLFRIENDS, IT DOESN'T LOOK REAL!"

"How do you even know it's mine?" Owain protested.

"It's yours." Severa assured.

"It could be Inigo's. How do you know it's not Inigo's?"

"…Because…"

"Because what?"

"Because we didn't do it in the way that gets you pregnant."

"OH MY GOD!" Robin wretched. These were the things people were going to be talking about instead of her plans for governing. "Who else knows about this?"

"…My mother…"

"Which means Sumia knows. Which means Chrom knows." *Damn it Owain.* "Who else?"

"No one."

"No one?"

"No one."

"Have you considered abor—"

"No. We're not doing that."

"Right then. We deny everything and say it's Inigo's baby," Robin decided.

"But it isn't." Severa restated.

"Nobody can prove that." *At least not until the little bastard is born with The Brand, but by then I'll be Exalt.*

"I'll tell them you're lying." Severa threatened.

"I'll tell them you're the village bicycle." Robin threatened right back. "Now you could say things and I could say things and we could make each other's lives very unpleasant. But that's aggravation that neither of us want. So lets make a deal."

"What kind of deal?" Robin was working an angle, and Severa saw that Robin was working an angle.

"I skim some funds off the campaign and pay you hush money. You say Inigo is the father and disappear for a while. You make bank. I hold my lead. Everybody wins."

"*Ummmm*…Isn't misusing campaign funds a bigger scandal then adultery?" Owain voiced concerns.

"How much bank?" Robin had Severa's attention.

"Name your price."

"I want a life estate in Cornwood and a cushy government job if you win."

"I will create a Ministry of Accountability to oversee the Ministry of Oversight and name you chief officer. You'll never have to work a day in your life."

"…That's right…I remember now…it WAS Inigo…" Severa played her part.

"This is campaign fraud, corruption of public office, and extortion." Owain felt dirty, and not because of the sex.

"Tomorrow when King Chrom addresses the people there will be one of two headlines. ***Grandmaster Robin Takes Commanding Lead; Voters Connect on Family Values*** or ***Grandmaster Robin Preaches Family Values while Husband Impregnates Unwed Teenager***." Robin took a stand. "DON'T GIVE ME THAT LOOK! You're the one who put a baby in her…"

"..."

"...is what we would be saying if it wasn't Inigo's…" Robin added.

"Its just SEX! Are people REALLY going to care that much!?" It still seemed to Owain that the cover-up was worse than the crime.

"You there…herdsman…" Robin pulled a random cattle rancher off the street, just to prove a point. "Who are you voting for?"

"Vaike."

"Why?"

"He gits it. We don't need no big gub'mint; ain't nothing they do worth 50 million gold! Taxman don't work for no one but the noble."

"So you like Vaike's positions and think he'd do the best job?"

"You betcha!"

"And who were you voting for before Vaike entered the race?"

"You."

"Of course you were. Now; what if you found out that Nowi cheated on Vaike with my lord husband?

"…Why then I guess I would be voting for Chrom…can't run a country if you can't even run your own marriage..."

"There ya go champ." Robin's point was proven, and Owain relented.

"…Soooooo…we're good now?" Severa prodded.

"Get out of here," Robin gave her the boot.

Robin knew that if the scandal went public her campaign was done.

What Robin didn't know was that Severa was working for Chrom.

"Robin is morally unfit to be your Exalt! She'll say anything and do anything to gain power; you cannot trust her!" King Chrom spoke to the people.

Whats this now? That was a very different attack then the one Robin had been expecting.

"I told her that I was pregnant with Owain's child!" Severa announced "First she told me to kill it. Then she told me she'd use campaign money to buy my silence. Then she told me she'd create a new ministry and put me in charge of it if I said Owain wasn't the father."

Oh, that dirty double-crossing ***WHORE!*** Robin. Was. PISSED.

"People of Ylisse; I may not be the wisest King who ever lived. At times I may blunder. But when I blunder I will tell you and I will humble myself in sorrow, and knowing that I have blundered I will strive to do better. I will never play you false."

And Chrom spoke at great length about honor and integrity; how the most important quality a leader could have was trustworthiness. Sumia and Lucina praised Chrom's honor as a genuine family man, and Severa spoke against Robin. By the time they were done, the crowd was roused into a great tumult.

"…well it was nice while it lasted…"Owain resigned himself to a public shaming and swift exit from the race. "Do we concede now or later?"

"Do you want to win?" Robin asked of him.

"There's no coming back from this." Owain felt the judging eyes upon him.

"Bullshit. Follow my lead." Robin took to the podium and spoke against the Exalt. "A DESPERATE PLOY FROM A DESPERATE KING; SEE HOW HE MUST BESMIRCH MY CHARACTER BECAUSE HE CANNOT COMPETE AGAINST MY IDEAS! I SPEAK OF TRADE AND JOBS AND PRUDENT SPENDING, AND HE ANSWERS WITH SLANDERS MOST FOUL!"

"LIAR!" Severa spat. "You…"

"Hold your tongue harlot!" Robin feigned outrage "YOU come before ME threatening to ruin my good name with claims my husband sired your bastard unless I pay your blackmail. Now you not only slander my marriage, you accuse me of corruption!?"

"WHAT!?" Severa was taken aback by the sheer audacity of the charge.

"Tell it true; was it your scheme, or Chrom's?"

"How DARE you!" Chrom would not have his character called into question. "My good and noble people; let not the trickery of this wicked woman deceive you. You know me by my works; an honest man I shall ever be, as an honest man I have ever been. So to do you know Robin; her's is the domain of plots and secrecies, and if there is scheming afoot it is her doing!"

"Yes *Your Grace*, I plot. I scheme. I keep my secrets. My plots and schemes are the reason your people aren't speaking Valmese and my secrets the reason you aren't licking The Conqueror's boot or worse; have you already forgotten!?" *I was a better leader of the Shepherds than you. And I'll be a better leader of Ylisse*, Robin let the implication hang. "I will be a strong Exalt because I know when to tell a truth and when to keep a secret. But I am not a crook, I will never hatch a scheme that isn't in the best interest of Ylisse, and I will not have my reputation tarnished by a petulant, ill-tempered, ***WHORE***!"

Chrom was at a loss, Severa ran away crying, and the crowd didn't know quite what to make of the sordid, sordid spectacle.

Some would say that Chrom was more believable in his sincerity. Some would say that Robin was been more believable in her passion. Some would say that even if Robin told it true, the cruelty with which she had thrown Severa to the wolves was nothing short of repugnant.

"You're the devil." Cordelia confronted Robin when the crowd's parted.

"You should be ashamed of yourself. How could you do that to poor Severa?" Sumia berated.

"I want to speak to my son." Lissa demanded. "OWAIN!"

"…Mother…" Owain at least had the decency to bow his head in shame.

"What REALLY happened. The TRUTH!" Lissa asked of him.

"…I…" Owain looked to Robin. Then to Lissa. Then to Robin again. Then said: "I haven't been with Severa since we broke up. She told me she's sleeping with Inigo now and that he got her pregnant, but that she thought she could blackmail Robin by saying it was me. She wanted a mansion and a governorship."

"…"

"There you have it; the truth's out!" Robin led her husband away and evaded further questions. "Come Owain; we've got a campaign to run!"

And then they were gone.

"…He's the real dad…" Lissa spoke definitively. Owain could act his way through a camp of bandits, but he couldn't pull one past her. Lissa knew when her son was lying.

"Robin can't win," Sumia decided. "I don't even care if Chrom loses to Vaike; he'll at least do an honest job. Robin's a snake."

"…A snake with fangs…" Cordelia had a devastated child to attend to because those fangs had bite. "How do we clip them?"

"…I have a few ideas…" Chrom may have been above scheming. Sumia wasn't.

Chapter 6: Chapter 6

Things got a little heavy last chapter. Don't worry people. Robin and Chrom are still friends.

Robin For Exalt

"Sometimes I wonder whether the world is being run by smart people who are putting us on or by imbeciles who really mean it."-Mark Twain-

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"**WE LIKE VAIKE! WE LIKE VAIKE!"** Severagate had left Chrom and Robin with the appearance of unclean hands, and one man was the clear beneficiary.

"Thank you! Thank you!" The Vaike spoke to his ever-expanding throng. "Teach is gonna answer all your questions! But first, a word from my good friend Kellam!"

"Ummmmm…hello…" Kellam took the stage, awkwardly. "It's come to my attention there's a rumor going around about me running for Exalt. No; I have not been campaigning while no one noticed. I actually don't even live here anymore. I moved to Rosanne with Cherche. Please stop voting for me. If elected, I will not serve."

"AllllllllRiGHT! IT'S VAIKE TIME!" Vaike retook the stage "Class in session; Teach is gonna take all y'all to school. You with the pot on your head…why is that a thing here…"

"What's your opinion on Severagate?" A Donnel-like creature asked. "Who do you believe?"

"Whole thing's ridiculous; Teach ain't gonna get involved in that garbage." Vaike opined. "Ya' ask me, the both of em should have kept it private. Ain't nobody's business. You there…woman with the freckles and headscarf…"

"Is it true that if you win, you'll change the Exalt's title to Supreme Master Big Nuts."

"What do I look; stupid!?" *Although that does sound kind of kickass.* "If I win, my title will be His Royal Vaikeness! You … buck-toothed man…"

"You've admitted you don't know much about governing. As Exalt, how will you…"

"…His Royal Vaikness…" Vaike corrected.

"As His Royal Vaikness, who will advise you on matters of state?" Vaike got asked an actual policy question.

"Excellent question!" Vaike was, remarkably, prepared to answer. "Now Teach won't be needing as many advisers 'cause Teach ain't gonna do as much. Limited government and whatnot…"

"**Less nobles; more money! Less nobles; more money!"**

"Yeah; that stuff. But Teach WILL need advisers. GOOD advisers. Advisers who know what's what, but aren't up their own ass with puffy heads and big ideas. Most important things gonna be makin' sure we keep our gold straight. That's why I'm naming Anna Master of Coin; come up here and let em' get a look at you Anna!"

"Hellllllloo Cuties! Boy; there sure are a lot of handsome men in this crowd! Give yourselves a round of applause!" Anna made her campaign trail debut, and Vaike's already surging poll numbers went through the roof.

"…I was wondering when you were going to show up…" Sumia made it her business to grab a private moment with Anna after the rally. "All the money in this race; I'm surprised it took this long…"

"Oh! Sumia!" Anna hadn't received a visit from the queen since she opened shop in downtown Ylisstol. That Sumia would have words with her the day she declared for a rival to her husband seemed just a tad passive-aggressive, and so Anna responded in kind. "No hard feelings, I hope. I gladly would have offered my services to Lord Chrom, but he couldn't be bothered to reach out to me. Imagine that!"

"No need for that. The last thing Chrom needs is another scandal; I'm sure he wouldn't want the trouble of having to explain why his Master of Coin is a common smut peddler."

"Beg your pardon?"

"It seems that a certain shop has been circulating certain images of the Shepherd's last trip to the Hotrealms. Images taken without our knowledge or consent. The captions are nothing short of pornographic."

"Surely, I don't know what you're talking about."

"*Sporty Redhead shows Fiery Bush and Rides Reverse Cowgirl.* Sully would gut you just for the F*iery Bush* part if these got back to her."

"…anyone could have taken those pictures…" Anna admitted nothing.

"*Foxy Feroxi flashes rockin' tits and gives perfect blowjob*.Olivia might not be too scary; but Lon'qu? Not even being a woman would save you…"

"…did I mention I have an evil twin…"

"*Tiny dragon-girl bends over and spreads for deep…*oh my….how would Vaike's fans like a GRAPHIC reminder that he married a girl who can pass for 12?*"*

"Okay. Okay. What do you want?" Anna yielded.

"The device that you used to take those pictures….you called it a camera…" Sumia cut to the chase. "Give it to me."

Obtaining the device by blackmail was the first thing Sumia did.

The second thing she did was inform Kellam that she had a job for him.

"How bad is it?" Robin hoped for the best and prepared for the worst.

"Could be better. Could be much, much worse." Owain broke down her numbers. "You took a HUGE hit in the woman's vote. You're still in the race…but damn…teenage girls hate you now…"

"Teenage girls are idiots. We can win them back with a concert and street fair." Robin considered. "What of the farmlands?"

"More inclined to believe your story than Chrom's. Even there though; undecideds are breaking for Vaike."

"Not the ideal field, but I've worked with worse." Snatching victory from the jaws of defeat was Robin's stock-and-trade. Somehow, someway, she would make it work.

"Father isn't going to barnstorm for you anymore. Mother gave him a stern what-for."

"Donny did his job. We've got our foothold." Robin was unperturbed by this development. "Losing women is the bigger problem. That was our firewall. Starting tomorrow, we'll…"

"Knock Knock," an unexpected visitor invited himself in.

"Chrom!" her Exalt and rival was the last person in the world Robin expected to see in her headquarters. "W-what are you doing here?"

"Can't a man catch up with an old friend?" Chrom sat himself at her table and offered a bottle of fine Moscato. "We're still friends aren't we; you didn't forget that while you were off practicing politics?"

"Through hell or high water." Robin's and Chrom's was a very peculiar sort of love/hate relationship; the kind that was never stronger than when they were at eah other's throats. "Still…you shouldn't be here…people might get the wrong ideas…"

"Bollocks! We haven't had a good heart-to-heart since you started running against me." Chrom poured a glass of wine for himself and a glass for his grandmaster.

"…but…"

"You've convinced half the realm you're madly in love with my nephew. What ideas are people going to get that you can't fib your way out of?" Chrom lifted his glass. "Owain! A moment alone with my grandmaster, if you would be so kind?"

"…Now see here…that's my wife…"

"And Severa's the mother of your child. Little good that did her."

"Did you really come here just to throw that in my face? I told you, it isn't true!"

"Oh, hush boy. Bullshit is for the campaign trail; leave it where it belongs. You owe your mother an apology by the way."

"Don't talk to me like I'm still a child!"

"You are a child."

"I AM A…"

"Its okay Owain. Leave us." Robin sent him away before he threw a tantrum. "Why ARE you here?" She asked of Chrom when there were no other ears in the room.

"Why do you think?"

"I think you just saw your best shot at taking me out of the race slip through your fingers and you're getting nervous." Robin swirled her wine and sipped.

"Aye; that was quite the stunt you pulled. Part of me was hoping it would take you out, and part of me just wanted to see how you'd wheedle your way out of it." Chrom didn't sound the least bit nervous. "Severa's on suicide watch. Was that really necessary?"

"I told her what would happen if she tried to fuck me. And she tried to fuck me."

"Noooooooo; I tried to fuck you. Severa was just the patsy." Chrom set the record straight.

"I'm aware." Robin knew how this game was played. "Don't worry. I'm gonna get you good."

"Gods almighty Robin; you're a pain in my ass." Chrom drank deep. "That's why I married Sumia."

"…And here I thought it was the rhubarb pies…" Robin teased, knowing full well that Chrom hated those stupid pies. The only pie Chrom had wanted was the one he saw that time he had walked in on her bathing.

It was rumored among the people—and common knowledge among the Shepherds—that then-Captain Chrom had entertained a brief (and intensely physical) romantic fling with a certain tactician before settling down with his queen.

"We were pretty wild back then, weren't we?" Chrom laughed and got that twinkle in his eye and smiled his dashing prince's smile. "The places we did it…it's a miracle the only one who ever caught us was Frederick…"

"Now people really ARE going to get the wrong idea." *Damn it; he's doing it again.* Robin flushed and reminded herself that this was the man she would be maligning come the morrow, and made a conscious effort not to get drawn in by his charm. "Please tell me you didn't come all this way just to discuss our youthful fornications?"

"Yes and no." Chrom admitted. "I came here to remind you what an amazing team we make. And to show you this," Chrom produced the latest tracking poll. "Read it and weep."

"…This can't be…"Robin read the data.

Vaike was winning.

"We've been tearing each other down while Vaike coasts and treating him as a non-threat." Chrom diagnosed the problem. "That needs to stop right now."

"Agreed." *If Vaike wins, I'm moving to Regna Ferox.* "…So what…you want to do a coordinated take-down?"

"That's the plan," Chrom handed Robin a folder of opposition research. "Vaike just named Anna his Master of Coin; this is all the dirt we've got on her. He didn't vet her at all. She's selling black market pornography of the Shepherd's, and that's not even top three on the list of things we can turn into scandals. These are the business records from the 'spa' she runs at the hot springs; it's really a brothel. This is a report from the Master of Interior on outstanding obligations to the crown; she's grossing 400,000 gold per month and hasn't paid taxes in 5 years…"

"…Yep…That'll do it…" Robin already knew the perfect angle. Good for Chrom; gathering all this useful information. "You know; if you ran your country half as well as you run your campaign, I never would have had to run against you in the first place."

"For what it's worth, I think you would be a great Exalt." Chrom confided. "Ask me in public, and I'll say you eat babies."

"And for what it's worth, I think you're maturing into a good king." Robin returned the compliment. "Ask me in public, and I'll say you molest livestock."

"Right. This conversation never happened," Chrom took his leave. "Oh; and Robin. One more thing."

"Yes?"

"Sumia wants you out of the race, and she's going to try something nasty. Stay sharp."

"Bring it, bitch."

Chapter 7: Chapter 7

Thank you, thank you, to everyone reading and responding to this fic.

I do this thing where I pimp my less popular stories in my more popular ones. It is in that spirit that I say to you: If you're reading this story and you like it and you also like FE7, check out "The Learning Curve" (I put WAY more work into that story. The lack of viewership and feedback on recent chapters has been disheartening). If you are reading this and you have already read and responded to "The Learning Curve," you are of course an awesome person.

Also have this (very, very M-Rated) thing called "Rock and Roll Creation" in the pipeline, but I'll attribute the lack of interest in that one to shoddy workmanship. Or possibly to younger viewers not wanting to read about their beloved Cordelia doing cocaine and punching bitches in the face...I don't know...

Anyways; back to the campaign!

Robin For Exalt

"Bigamy is having one wife too many. Monogamy is the same" -Oscar Wilde-

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"Revenue streams…the problem is revenue streams…" Chrom muttered to no one in particular and tapped his pen and moved numbers around the royal ledger. Robin wasn't doing his work for him anymore, which meant that Chrom actually had to balance his own budget.

Anna as it turned out was just the tip of the iceberg; Chrom hadn't realized until this very moment just how much money he was losing because the wealthiest Ylisseans were exploiting, avoiding or otherwise wiping their ass with the tax code. *Maribelle's parents are reporting 19,000 in taxable income. That's bullshit; they're both millionaires. Hierarch Haggerty is reporting full payment in deductions from charitable donations. He donated to a vineyard that he owns. GODS; whats the point of having an estate tax if no one pays the damn thing!?*

"Queen's convoy returning from the farmlands!" Sir Frederick reported. "The campaign events went well enough, ***but***…"

"…What now…" There was something about that ***but*** that told Chrom he was in for another headache.

"You should speak to Sumia," Frederick counseled. "She seems...cross…"

"Why?"

"You should speak to Sumia." Frederick repeated tersely and gave no further details.

"Seven Hells!" Chrom closed his ledger. It occurred to him that the reason he had started dumping all his work on Robin in the first place was so that he could better attend to his marital duties. *Sumia was supposed to be the drama-free wife.*

There was no such thing as drama-free.

"Sumia!" Chrom made to greet his wife warmly and mark her return with hugs and cuddles. But she did not return his affections, and offered only a dispassionate "…Chrom…" by way of acknowledgment.

"Okay; what did I do?" Chrom sighed.

"Nothing."

Really? We're playing this game now? "I must have done something. You're mad at me."

"I'm not mad. Why would I be mad?"

"I don't know; you tell me!"

"What were you doing while I was out in the farmlands?"

"The same thing you were doing. Campaigning."

"***Campaigning***?"

"Governing too. I think I'm finally starting to get a knack for ledgers; its like learning a new weapon." *Except without any of*

the things that make learning a new weapon fun.

"That's all?"

"Pretty much; yeah. My life really isn't that exciting." *Not since we murdered Grima's face.*

"There's nothing else you want to tell me?"

"Nope."

"So if I had a device that showed me where you were and what you were doing while I was away from the capital, I wouldn't see you drinking alone and flirting with Robin?"

"Oh. That."

"..."

"We were talking campaign strategy and trying to figure out what to do about Vaike. I was not *FLIRTING*."

"You brought ***Moscato***."

"I was being polite."

"You were trying to seduce her."

"What!? No; I would never!" *I WAS trying to seduce her. How does she bloody know that?*

"Liar! You're sleeping with her again, aren't you?"

"Now you're just being ridiculous."

"So I WASN'T being ridiculous when I said you were flirting with her?"

"…No…that's not what I…"

"LIAR!"

"Fine! I used some charm to throw her off her game. Its just to take down Vaike and keep her off my back; there's nothing going on between us."

"…"

"You don't believe me!?"

"…"

"I don't know where this insecurity is coming from. Sumia…I swear…I'm…"

"YOU HAD HER IN YOUR BED THREE DAYS BEFORE OUR WEDDING!"

Annnndddd we're back to this again.

"Then you named her grandmaster! Then you gave her free run of the castle! Then you stopped holding court and gave her all your duties! Now she's trying to take your throne and you're HELPING her! GODS; its like you've been TRYING to make her queen ever since you married me!"

"If I wanted Robin to be my queen I would have married her. I married YOU." Once more, Chrom put his princely charms to good use. "I love you. You know I love you. I've been nothing but fiathful since the day we said our vows. Things are just…weird right now…"

"Why are you helping her?"

"Because Vaike is going to win if we don't call a truce."

"So what if he does? Theres worse things in the world than Vaike winning." *Like Robin winning.*

"I'm going to win. I'm THE EXALT." Chrom had better reason than mere ego to be confident of that now. "As long as we

can break Vaike's lead—and with me and Robin both working at it, we WILL break Vaike's lead—Robin herself is going to be easy pickings. I've got a bomb to drop on her that no amount of wordplay or political posturing is going to deflect, and once it drops her campaign is over. But If I have to lose—and I *won't*—I'd rather lose to someone who knows how to govern than to the axe man who shows up to battle without his axe."

"Your're saying you'd rather see a sleazeball with governing skills run Ylisse than a good and honest dullard?

"That I am."

"Then why are you still running?"

"Because I know I can do better." Of this Chrom had never been more certain. "And I know I can do better without all the lies and secrets and unseemliness that Robin thinks is as good for governing as for winning wars."

"You were supposed to be working with Vaike to take out Robin, not working with Robin to take out Vaike."

"Vaike was supposed to be a joke candidate, not in it to win it. And not for nothing; but do you know what people are going to think if they see me and Robin breaking him down? ***Oh; when Chrom is King and Robin is Grandmaster, work gets done. There's absolutely no reason we need to change that.***"

"And you swear that's the ONLY reason you're back together?"

"We're not ***back together***. We shared one bottle of wine and talked politics."

"You didn't talk about anything else?"

We made fun of your Rhubarb pies, drank to all the wild and crazy sex we use to have before I married you, and I warned that you were plotting against her. That last part was just to distract from how I'M plotting against her, but still…
"Nothing else. Cross my heart; hope to die."

"…"

"…"

"…"

"…"

"Fine. I believe you." Sumia was satisfied. "I was gonna back Robin into one of her fibs, then prove her a liar and a fraud with on camera…."

"..the fuck is a *camera*?"

"Unimportant. Whats your plan?"

"Its super, super secret. You can't tell anybody. Promise?"

"Cross my heart; hope to die."

"…"

"…"

"…"

"Not even Lucina?"

"Don't tell anybody."

"Alright, Alright. Spill the beans.

"Right. We're going to…" Chrom leaned in and whispered.

"Oh WOW…that's mean…" Sumia almost felt sorry for Robin. Almost. "When is this happening?"

"The day before the polls open. Its going to be the last thing on Ylisse's mind when the people go to cast their vote.

"Beautiful."

"…"

"…"

"…"

"Can I tell Cordelia?"

" DON'T. TELL. ANYBODY."

"Goodness Anna…that's quite the crowd you've drawn…" Robin sprung the trap. She couldn't ask for a more public forum. "Such speeches you must be giving to draw them so!"

"Awww; aren't you sweet!" Anna winked and played the bubbly airhead (the woman could out-act Owain on a good day). "Just spreading the word; Ylisse will never have a budget crisis again with His Royal Vaikeness on the Throne and Amazing Anna in the Treasury!"

"Yes…budget crises…damnable things…" Robin stole a spot on Anna's podium. "Why do we have those again?"

"Because King Chrom spends like a drunken sailor, silly!"

"Is that the reason for it?" Robin stole a spot on Anna's podium and put on her ***I'm Outraged!*** face. "Or is it because the rich aren't paying their fair share!?"

"*What are you doing?"* Anna hissed. Quietly.

"PEOPLE OF YLISSE!" Robin shouted. "Did you know that last year, the head of the Merchant's Guild only paid 200 gold in taxes?"

"**200 gold!?"**

"**Is that true!?"**

"**I pay more than that!"**

"The dockhands moving the guild's freight pay more than the guildmaster! Ylisse has the wealth to keep the roads paved and the streets clean and pay for all of Chrom's frivolities and then some. Bankers and bosses horde it, then tell you there isn't enough money to make government do the people's work without raising YOUR taxes. Is that fair!?"

"**Hell no!"**

Are you going to take it!?"

"**HELL NO!"**

"Now see here!" Anna attempted to retake control of the mob. "Vaike WILL do the people's work. And if you aren't a millionaire, Vaike will NOT raise your taxes. We believe that…"

"…How much do you pay in taxes?" Robin asked.

"Beg your pardon?"

"You're a ***millionaire***."

"I'm a ***successful businesswoman****."*

"How much do you pay in taxes?"

"That's not the issue. The issue is YOUR government wasting YOUR money on…"

"How much do you pay in taxes?"

"Forty-Seven percent of Ylisseans don't even pay more than they…"

"How much . Do you pay. In ***TAXES***?"

"…I don't like what you're insinuating…"

"I insinuate only that the wealthiest Ylisseans should do their part to fund the upkeep of this great country which allowed them to become wealthy; that there is something fundamentally unjust about benefiting from the boons of lawfulness and social order and then doing nothing to preserve those boons for prosperity. Something offensive to common notions of decency and fair play. Would you agree?"

"…"

"Would you agree?"

"Of course. Anyone who disagrees would be entirely unfit to hold public office."

"I'm so glad we're on the same page," Robin left the podium. "...Oh...You may now be interested to know that when Chrom wasn't paying attention to what he was signing, I wrote Miranda Rights into the Penal Code. ***Frederick!"***

"Miranda what now—***eeeeeeeeek***!" Anna fell beneath a rush of great knight.

"You're under arrest for tax evasion, racketeering, fraud, larceny, obstruction of justice, and conspiracy to commit prostitution," Frederick tackled her to the ground and applied handcuffs. "You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law..."

Chapter 8: Chapter 8

I am going to get soooo much shit for this chapter. Oh well…when you gotta write, you gotta write… (The thing about writing political satire is that sometimes you turn on the news, and your chapter just writes itself)

With this latest installment, the genre is officially changed from "Humor" to "Humor/Parody"

Robin for Exalt

"Fuck the Police." -N.W.A.-

"WHY DID YOU TACKLE HER!?" Sumia shouted. Not because she was outraged (she WAS outraged), but to be heard over the hordes of protestors picketing and chanting at the castle gates.

"She was reaching for my sword. I felt threatened."

"Twenty-Seven witnesses said she was not reaching for your sword." Chrom had never known Frederick to be a liar. But his story was, quite frankly, unbelievable.

"I had reason to believe from my years of combat training that she was about to reach for my sword, based on movement s not readily perceivable to a civilian crowd."

"…You broke her neck…" Lissa gaped.

"That was not my intention."

"YOU BROKE HER NECK!" Lissa repeated, louder and angrier.

"Even people who believe that Anna reached for your sword don't believe you needed to use that much force to subdue her." Lucina weighed in.

"…Your point being?" Sir Frederick was unmoved.

"What do you mean ***my point being***!? You can't use lethal force against a civilian unless there's a clear and immediate threat to your life or to public safety. It's the LAW!"

"Incorrect," Frederick recited the applicable statute from memory. "An officer of the law may use lethal force against any suspect who has committed or attempted to commit a felony, as he reasonably believes is necessary in effecting an arrest."

"…that is not the law…" Chrom too was under the impression that Ylissean knights could not kill Ylissean civilians unless there was an immediate threat to the officer's life or to the public safety.

"It's the law." Frederick assured him.

"Impossible; if that's the law, how could you EVER indict a knight for killing a civilian? All a knight has to do is testify he believed the killing to be reasonable at the time and it becomes lawful...how is that a thing…"

"I didn't write it. The law favors the presumption that whenever an officer of the law uses force he does so lawfully; ask the hierarchs why."

"Someone run down to the royal library and check the penal code," Chrom wanted this sourced. "This is a free country; there's no way that's the law."

"…On it…" Sumia moved.

CRASH!

A brick flew through the window of Chrom's throne room, and the sounds of rioting spilled through the shattered glass.

"Shall I arrest these vandals?" Frederick tended to the damages.

"…Please don't…" Chrom sunk into his throne and cradled his forehead in exacerbation. "Today's headline was supposed to be ***Top Financial Adviser to Vaike Campaign Arrested for Defrauding the Crown***, not ***No Murder***

Charges After Unarmed Woman Killed in Public Arrest; Thousands Riot Over Knight Brutality."

"…they're really going at it out there…" Lissa backed away from the windows. "No one's even talking about debt or taxes or sex scandals."

"People get really, really mad when civilians are publicly murdered by law enforcement and no one is punished." Lucina couldn't say she blamed them.

"It was not ***murder!***" Frederick insisted. "Murder is unlawful. I followed the law to the letter."

"If you followed the law to the letter, there is something seriously wrong with the law." Lucina jabbed.

"Perhaps and perhaps not; it is not my place to say. But if there is a defect in the law, the only ones who suffer for it are criminals." Sir Frederick still was unmoved. "Do nothing that you can be arrested for, and you need not fear what can be done to your person in a lawful arrest."

"You can be arrested for selling black-market cigarettes; does that mean you can kill people for doing it!?"

"If I reasonably believe that use of lethal force is necessary to effect the arrest, yes, I can." Frederick knew his law.

"…that's the most horrible thing I've ever heard…" Lucina had half a mind to join the rioters right then-and-there.

"How do we get out from this?" Chrom asked the obvious question.

"Can I give the obvious answer?" Lucina offered.

"How do we get out of this *without feeding Frederick to an angry mob*?" Chrom amended his question.

"Oh, Oh; I know!" Lissa had an idea. "What if we haul Frederick into court just to say that we did it—you know—to show people that the system works! There'd be a judge and we'd put witnesses against him. Then we'd say there isn't enough evidence that he broke the law to charge him with anything and let him go before trial"

"I'm pretty sure ***we investigated ourselves and cleared ourselves of any wrongdoing*** would just make people angrier," Lucina opined. "And make them think the whole system is broken."

"If the law is what Frederick says it is, the whole system IS broken." Chrom did not hide his sentiments on the matter.

"…found it…" Sumia returned with a textbook on Criminal Law.

"What does it say?" Chrom asked apprehensively.

"*Chapter 563, Section 046.1, Subheading 3(a)-2*,**"** Sumia read aloud. *"A law enforcement officer in effecting an arrest or in preventing an escape from custody is justified in using deadly force when he reasonably believes that such use of deadly force is immediately necessary to effect the arrest and also reasonably believes that the person to be arrested has committed or attempted to commit a felony."*

"…That is terrifyingly vague..." Such laws should not exist in free nations, Lucina thought.

"You don't even have to do anything or attempt to do anything illegal; a knight just has to ***believe*** you did?" Chrom was dumbfounded.

"…that's what it says…" Sumia hadn't skipped a word.

"Shouldn't it be—I don't know—harder to legally kill citizens of the Halidom?" Lissa tried to imagine a scenario where a knight on duty COULDN'T raise a meritorious defense of lawfulness under the existing law.

"…there's more…" Sumia read the accompanying footnotes. "In the past year, over 400 Ylisseans have been killed by knights on duty."

"Surely you do not object to ridding the halidom of violent criminals!?" Frederick challenged.

"Violent crime rates in the halidom are the lowest they've been in 30 years. The number of civilians killed per annum by knights has climbed throughout this period, and is higher now than its ever been," Sumia continued.

"…I retract my previous statement…" Frederick ceded the point.

"At last measure, citizens being killed by knights of Ylisse were three percent of all homicides in the halidom. This is likely an underestimate, because the laws requiring knight commanders to report the killing of civilians by their officers are not enforced and only self-enforcing commanders comply. In the history of the halidom only13 knights have ever been successfully convicted of murder."

"That's…*errrrrrr*…give me a moment…" Frederick didn't have a good comeback for any of that.

"…Right…I've heard enough…" King Chrom rose. "The people cry out for justice and their Exalt hears them. I will make this right."

"There's one more thing." Sumia cautioned.

"What else?" Chrom could only hope it was nothing too awful.

"Robin is in the streets marching with the protestors."

"…Of course she is…"

"This tome is banned from non-military use in five countries. ***BOLOGNONE!***" Robin demonstrated the effects of high-level fire magic on a covered wagon and vaporized it in a single blast.

"***THAT'S* what law mages are allowed to wield against us!?"**

"**This is a bloody police state!"**

"**NO JUSTICE; NO PEACE! NO JUSTICE; NO PEACE!"**

"Stop it." Owain dragged her out of the limelight. "You're inciting a riot."

"These people were rioting before I got here and are going to riot regardless of what I say, and they have every reason to. Justice demands it...or something. But I'll be damned if I'm going to let a perfectly good crisis of confidence in government efficacy go to waste; this is political gold." Robin wasn't inciting. She was riding the wave.

Owain saw her back into the fray, turned away, and vomited. That at a moment like this politicians could think of only of how to extend their political brands was nothing short of sickening.

"Where is Justice!? Where is your King!?" Robin challenged. "It is his knights that the law cannot hold to account! Does he hear you!? Is he moved!?"

At that very moment the royal trumpets blared.

"**The Exalt speaks!"**

"**He HAS heard us!"**

"**Bollocks; he'll send his knights against us and run us off like they always do!"**

"PEOPLE OF YLISSE!**"** Chrom addressed the unruly masses. "You are right to shake the nation with your protests; there has been a gross miscarriage of justice! No single act and no single actor has brought us here. No single act and no single actor can be punished to make it right; it is a deeper failure—a failure of law—one that can only be corrected by a change of law."

The rioting quelled, the people hung on their Exalt's every word, and never had Robin ever looked upon Chrom and seen a worthier king.

"This much is now plain; there must be more accountability for officers of the law to ensure that they are not above the law. The following reforms shall be effective IMMEDIATELY!

(1) No officer may use lethal force in effecting an arrest, except as necessary to save a life or for the public safety. This shall be the law of every province. Your king commands it.

(2) All knights must wear the device that Anna called a *camera* while on duty. No use of force by a knight against a civilian shall be lawful, unless deemed objectively reasonable by a reviewing magistrate upon review of the camera feed. Your king commands it.

(3) All cases in which a knight kills a civilian shall be subject to adequate and independent review. No knight may be cleared of wrongdoing, except by a civilian court of non-knights. Your king commands it.

I understand that this is a painful time for our people, and that we must come together to heal. I trust at this moment we can put political differences aside, and do what needs to be done for the good of the halidom. So help us God."

All eyes turned to Robin.

This is the part where I'm supposed to say everything Chrom just said is wrong, accuse him of advocating lawlessness, and tell everyone who thinks the king is advocating lawlessness to give me money.

"…My opponent…" At this moment, Robin realized, she could refrain from completely selling her soul and do the right thing. Or she could become Rush Limbaugh.

Infernal Spawn of Grima and Avatar of Armageddon I might be, but I am NOT Rush Limbaugh.

"My opponent and I disagree on many things. But today he is in the right and he speaks sincerely for the good of Ylisse. This anger…this violence…we are better than this as a people. Let us come together and heal."

"What about Frederick!?" Vaike called out. Not to be incendiary; but because he didn't know any better.

Vaike; you fucking moron. Robin facepalmed.

"What about him?" Chrom answered.

"Will Frederick be charged with a crime for killing Anna?"

Please, please, please, please, please have a tactful answer.

"No. Frederick will not be brought up on criminal charges because he didn't break any laws."

The crowd roared, the rioting resumed, and Ylisstol burned.

AUTHOR'S NOTES:

-If you don't live in America—sorry—this chapter is probably really confusing.

-If you live in America and you don't know why this chapter is what it is, shame on you.

-The most horrifying thing about the statute Sumia read is that it is completely non-fiction. That is the actual text of the Missouri Statute governing when police officers are allowed to use lethal force. **(HashTag Ferguson)**

Chapter 9: Chapter 9

Oh wow; I didn't get ANY flames or hate mail after that last chapter. And, surprisingly enough, the bulk of the commentary on its political subtext came from international readers. (Step it up Americans. Canadians and Europeans showed more interest in whats going on in our streets...that's jut embarrassing...)

On that note:

Robin For Exalt

"Dey Terk Urr Jerbs!" -South Park-

"Three cafes, two apothecaries, a salon, a jeweler, and a clothier," Sumia confirmed the list of businesses destroyed in the rioting.

"…I liked that clothier…" Lucina was going to need to find a new place to buy atrocious, polka-dot print dresses for the women of the royal family. (Sumia wondered if it would be in poor taste to celebrate that particular establishment burning to the ground)

Anna's Law (Robin in an unsolicited moment of helpfulness had hinted it would be a *tactful* name for Chrom's penal code reforms) had gone into effect with popular support. And there had been no further rioting since Frederick had been stripped of his knighthood (if only to placate the mobs; behind closed doors Chrom continued to insist he had done nothing deserving of a demotion to steward). But Ylisse still very much bore the scars of civil unrest.

"With order restored, there's still this business of holding my throne." Chrom considered his next move. His crisis leadership had won a fragile peace that he did not think could survive the headline that was supposed to knock Robin out of the race. ***Gangrel Endorses Robin for Exalt; No Comment From Plegian-Born Grandmaster*** would have been a hilarious way to win, but that whole plan was now on hiatus. "What are my numbers?"

"Narrowly leading Robin," Lucina had the latest polls. "Vaike's in distant third; he came out of the riots looking like he didn't know how to lead in a crisis. In a roundabout way, you got your take-down."

"…So we're right back where we started." Sumia didn't like the sound of that. She remembered the Shepherd days; Robin would back them into no-win scenarios and pull off impossible wins just for the fun of it. A Robin within a 5-point swing of taking the lead was as good as Exalt.

"We are and we aren't." Chrom mused. "I've learned how to govern and Robin's learned how to not come across as a raging bitch. We're playing a much more interesting game now."

"If this is a game, then what's your win-condition?" Sumia asked. "The Gangrel effect was going to get you there. You need something else now."

"Gangrell Effect?" Lucina blinked

"*SUMIA*!" Chrom couldn't have been more explicit in his ***don't tell anyone***.

"…Oh like it matters now…you aren't going to do it…" Sumia scoffed.

"Do what?" Lucina pressed.

"Nothing. Don't worry about it." Chrom downplayed. "But I've been thinking; maybe we can get the same effect without going scorched earth and burning bridges. A strong positive endorsement to raise me up, rather than a powerful negative endorsement to knock Robin down."

"You will need a VERY strong positive endorsement to match the boom of Gangrel endorsing Robin."

"…oh my god….you didn't…" Lucina was judging him.

"Damn it Sumia." This is why Chrom couldn't tell her secrets.

"Don't ***damn it Sumia*** me*; YOU* should have told her in the first place!" Sumia chewed him out the way that only a wife could. "Stay focused. That plan was going to work because rednecks already think Robin is an illegal Plegian, or some such nonsense. And because Gangrel is so universally HATED that anything he endorses is worse than Hitler. Who in

the world is so beloved and so identified with what people love about you that they can give you the same turn-around."

"*Ummmm*…Helloooo…I'm Blood of the Hero King and Champion of the Divine Dragon. ***Tiki***."

"Oh. That's…actually a really good idea…" Sumia was shocked by how many of those Chrom seemed to be having lately.

"It's a GREAT idea," Chrom reached for a serving girl's tray and grabbed an exotic cocktail to celebrate his new-found insights. It tasted of mint leaf and tropical fruit. A foreign-looking, heavily accented serving girl that Chrom had never seen before carried the serving tray; she must have been new. "And now we only need it to beat Robin. Vaike is done; the only way he stays in this race is if an issue that gets the plebs even more riled up than knight brutality comes along and Vaike gets ahead on messaging before we get our talking points up. GODS; this drink is FANTASTIC! What's it called?"

"Es un Mojito , Senor Chrom."

"Why have I never had this before!?"

"Es nuevo to Ylisse; just come from Plegia with 10 million *trabajadores*." The serving girl left the room.

"That's the best news I've heard all—wait—*what did she just say!*?"

"These god-damn Plegians keep coming to ***OUR*** country, taking ***OUR*** jobs, and it's the Ylissean worker who's getting shafted!"

"**That's right!"**

"**You tell 'em Vaike!"**

"**Ylisstol is selling us out!"**

"They eat ***OUR*** food and use ***OUR*** toilets! Meanwhile there's no bread and the sewers keep backing up!" With an undereducated and bigoted electorate of old-fashioned country folk and an economy still in shambles, Vaike didn't have to be particularly articulate or charming or in command of facts for his talking points to catch on like wildfire. "Chrom don't care; fancy nobles just want cheap labor to staff their castles. Plegians sweep their halls and trim their hedges for half of what a Ylissean will work for. And ***ROBIN*** ain't gonna help ya. Robin wants ***MORE*** Plegians 'cause she knows they'll vote for her. First day I'm Exalt—I'll tell you what—Teach is gonna put up a big ol' wall and kick out all the Plegians and *GET YOU YOUR JOBS BACK!*"

"**We like Vaike! We like Vaike!"**

"…Ridiculous…" Robin had a rare moment of unfiltered, un poll-tested honesty. "The guilds are waiting to see how the debt crisis resolves before they start hiring again and the hierarchs let the merchants who fund their conclaves write the wage laws, and you think ***immigrants*** are the reason there's job shortages and stagnant wages!?"

"***Boooooooooo!"*** The crowd jeered

"**Why do you hate Ylissean workers!?"**

"**Go back to Plegia!"**

"**Every Plegian working in Ylisse is one less job for a Ylissean. You think that's fair!?"**

"That's not how this works! That's not how any of this works!" Robin attempted to give team Vaike a basic education in economics. "Immigrants aren't just units of supply in the labor market. They're also units of demand in the market for goods and services. People are both laborers and consumers, and when people consume they create the demand for new labor. That's how you get ***growth***; more people doing more jobs, buying more things. Immigration is a *BOON* to our economy. You don't get 10 million new jobs if you kick out the Plegians; you get 10 million fewer persons demanding Ylissean goods and buying from Ylissean businesses , then you get…"

"***Boooooooooo!"***

"***LIAR!" DIRTY PLEGIAN LIAR!"***

"***My son can't get a job at the royal palace and a Plegian woman pours Chrom's drinks! Don't you DARE tell me THOSE PEOPLE aren't taking jobs away from good, hard-working Ylisseans!"***

"…Yeah…Fuck This…" Robin cut her losses and retreated to HQ. She knew she shouldn't be touching the immigration issue with a 10-foot pole, unless to say something to the effect of what Vaike had just said. It was a political landmine.

Robin had long since accepted that she was going to have to dumb down her arguments and shamelessly pander to the unlearned and the backward to win the race, but damn it, she still had standards. One thing she would NOT do was agitate for a policy that she knew to be toxic to the health of the halidom, just to appeal to nativist angst and popular prejudice.

…Or would she?

Vaike was going to get a shit-ton of votes doing it; votes Robin needed to beat Chrom. Of course to Vaike it wasn't pandering; the oaf actually believed every word he was saying. Robin on the other hand would be lying through her teeth if she played that angle, but really, It was just one more fib (why did this one feel different?). It was bad policy. She knew it was bad policy. And she would never, ever act upon it. But it was all for the good of the halidom if it put her on the throne; she WAS the best suited to lead, right? No harm, no foul...

…but what if there WAS harm? What if people *REALLY* believed the lies and the scapegoating? What if words weren't enough to walk it back? What if they took matters into their own hands?

"Owain; help. I think I'm having a moral crisis."

"You have morals?" Owain gave her the evil eye.

"There is an issue where the position I know is right is extremely unpopular, and the position I know is popular is completely wrong." Robin ignored the slight. "Do I pander, do I take the hit, or do I just ignore it?"

"You're actually asking for my opinion?"

"Believe it or not, I value your opinion."

"*Pfttttttttt*."

"Really; I do!"

"Let's pretend for a moment that I believe that." Owain indulged her. "What's this about?"

"The immigration issue."

"…Oh lord…"

"I want to tell voters that Plegian immigration is good for them. Talk sense into me."

"If you tell voters that Plegian immigration is good for them, you are going to lose. Badly." This would have been true before Plegia and Ylisse fought two wars; now it was just a no-brainer. "ANY candidate who tells voters that Plegian immigration is good for them is going to lose badly. But you especially have to control your image. You already have a certain…reputation…"

"But it IS good for them! Do these people have any godly idea how many Ylissean businesses would be out-of-business if 10 million customers just up and left the country!?"

"No. They don't. And you're not going to convince them, so don't even try." Owain advised. "People believe what they want to believe. People want to believe that there are easy answers to hard problems; it makes them feel safe. Nothing is easier than ***everything is wrong because of THESE PEOPLE; get rid of them and everything will be better.*** It's stupid and bigoted and it doesn't make sense. But it is what it is, and you can't change it."

He was right. Robin knew he was right. But…

"I'm a LEADER! Leaders lead. If I'm just following public opinion on every issue, I'm not leading!"

"You wanted democracy. You got democracy. If you just wanted to pass whatever laws your smarts and your education informed you were good for the halidom without public opinion being a problem, you should have kept the monarchy."

"...Shit..." Robin grumbled. *I think I liked this country better when it WAS a monarchy*.

Authors Note: Zeek72 suggested all the way back in Chapter 3 that I should bring Tiki on board. As a Robin surrogate

rather than as a Chrom surrogate...but still...Props to Zeek for feeding me a good prompt.

All feedback is helpful feedback. That being said; taxation, public spending, jobs, police brutality, and immigration have thus far appeared as unprompted campaign issues. Give me an issue prompt you'd like to see me play around with, and I just might play around with it.

Chapter 10: Chapter 10

Robin for Exalt

"**I know some who are constantly drunk on books as other men are drunk on whiskey.**" -H.L. Mencken-

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"Does it bother anyone else that my dad is an uneducated alcoholic with no leadership skills or experience in government?" Nah, of all people, was not sold on Team Vaike. (and more then a little perturbed by some of the kooks his campaign had gathered as followers)

"We don't want no gub'mint insider; they made the mess!" a more ardent supporter tried to bring her into the fold.

"Common sense solutions for Ylisse; Vaike gets it!" sloganeered another.

"Ain't nuthin' you can learn in a castle or in a library worth more than workin' the fields," a portly pig farmer and bona-fide kook ranted. "Them snooty liberals in Ylisstol—buryin' their heads in them ***books*** and thinkin' theys some great ***thinkers***—they done never worked a day in their life! Got no idea how things really is; tellin' us men can marry men and Plegains takin' er jerbs is ***good*** for us. Books must make ya mighty stupid if that's what you git from ***reading!***"

Nah didn't no whether to laugh or cry, so she sighed and silently helped herself to Vaike's whiskey.

"Theys so open-minded their brains fall out, and they says wes some bigots 'cause we don't want dem perverts and illegals ruinin' er country!" the kooks got kookier. "I ain't no bigot! Theys the bigots! Racist libtards hatin' traditional Ylisseans; dats racist!"

"Intolerance of intolerance is intolerance…sure…" Nah drank. *Sweet merciful god. Does father even realize this is what hes pandering to?*

"**ER MAH GERD; YOU GUYS!"** Vaike barged into HQ with a look of outrage and a book of law; the latter landing with a windmill slam on the serving counter (Vaike's campaign HQ is a tavern) as Vaike shouted for everyone to gather round. **"YOU ARE NOT GOING TO BELIEVE WHAT I JUST FOUND!"**

"You read now?" Nah glimpsed the text. It looked WAY above Vaike's level.

"—Course I read! I read ya to sleep every night when you were little, didn't I?"

"***My Pet Goat***. Not ***Rules of Administrative Procedure Governing the Courts of Ylisse."***

"Oh shush; a book's a book. Look at this! Remember that law Chrom passed 'bout how big government has to pay for everyone's healers, and gets to take your healer away if the hierarchs think its too expensive?"

"…That's not what the law says…" Nah wasn't a scholar. But she was dating one. "You didn't read it. You have no idea what it does or how it works. You listened to someone else who didn't read it and has no idea what it does or how it works tell you why you should hate it."

"That's a bunch of hooey; the Vaike knows whats up!" Vaike pointed to his book. "Says it right here; they don't even have to use the courts. If the hierarchs think its too expensive for you to go to a healer, it goes to a ***Quality Review Board***. There's them **death panels** I was tellin' ya about. If they don't like the way you LOOK at them, they can say you cost too much to heal."

"**KNEW IT!"**

"**IT'S A CONSPIRACY I TELLZ YAZ! THEY WANNA KILL OFF ALL US TRADITIONAL YLISSEANS AND MAKE THE WHOLE COUNTRY THINK LIKE THEM CITY SLICKERS!"**

"**FACISTS! NEXT THEY'LL BE PUTTING US IN CAMPS!"**

"No one is putting anybody in camps!You people are RIDICULOUS!" Nah was drinking straight Bourbon, and she couldn't kill enough brain cells for that line of thinking to make sense. "It's a law that stops people from dying because they can't afford healing and having their life-savings wiped out when they call a healer. You're acting like it's the end of civilization."

"**God's Vaike!"**

"**When did your daughter become such a freedom-hating liberal?"**

"She can't help it…she gets it from her mother…" Vaike deflected. "Here's what CAN be helped; we're gonna take to the streets! We're gonna spread the word that Chromcare ain't no good. And we ain't gonna stop until Ylisstol gets outa the way and lets the best healers in the world do their job! "

"**Here here!"**

"**That's right! That's RIGHT!"**

"**The King is a criminal! Chromcare is TREASON!"**

"Hey; none of that now!" Vaike scolded. "Chrom's a GOOD man. A FINE man. He just don't know any better. Don't know how us real folks live; he's got a big ol' heart and a head full of bad ideas," Vaike spoke completely deaf to the irony.

Nah thought to say something, thought better of it, and drank more Bourbon.

"Now ya'll know Chrom ain't gonna change the law. It's his namesake. Robin's even worse; she thinks Chromcare doesn't go far enough!" That was the first factually correct thing Vaike had said all day. "A vote for either one of them is a vote for more government getting between you and your healer. Ya'll know whatcha gotta do?"

"**Out of the taverns; into the streets! Out of the taverns; into the streets!"**

"Damn straight!" Vaike led his supporters in protest.

"*Whyyyyyyy?"* Nah face-planted against the now empty table and made to take another swig of whiskey.

"That's enough of that…easy now…" Laurent confiscated the bottle and steadied her in her seat.

"He's ***SO*** dumb." Nah shook with adorable, tiny little fists of rage. Her first impression of her parents had been that Nowi had the mind of a child, and that nothing short of raw sexual thrill could explain what Vaike saw in her. She now believed the reverse to be true.

"He...means well..." Laurent offered by way of conciliation. "And his criticism of the law—misguided though his proposed remedy might be—is not entirely without merit." *Robin had the right of it. We needed to remove private insurance as a barrier to access. Not get everyone insured. Chromcare was a half-hearted compromise to get enough support to pass from the Vaike's of the world...that was poorly done.*

"I just don't understand how he can be so opinionated and be so sure that all his opinions are right when he ***doesn't know anything.*** And he acts like that's a ***selling point***!" Never had Nah seen such a glorious celebration of ignorance as at a Vaike rally, where "academic" was a dirty word and Robin had been booed off the stage for arguing hard economics instead of ***Dey Terk Errr Jerbs***!

"He is not alone in his thinking." Laurent understood the political undercurrents at play. "Vaike's anti-intellectualist populism taps into something deep and salient in the electorate. This perception that academics are a parasitic class and that education is brainwashing—that the zenith of social utility and useful knowledge is to be found in the life experience of the working class—it is perception born of a society that treats quality education as a commodity to be purchased by a privileged few rather than as a fundamental right and public good."

"…I guess…" Nah squeezed under Laurent's cape and pretended like she understood half of what he just said. "This whole democracy thing doesn't work unless people are educated, does it?"

"When the people govern themselves, they get a government commensurate with their level of civic awareness and engagement," Laurent agreed with much headier language. "It works to the extent that voters have the requisite interest and base of knowledge to make it work. Where the requisites are lacking, the people are governed by buffoons who can appeal to the lowest common denominator and tricksters who tell people what they want to hear."

"Ylisse wasn't ready for this…" Nah had been thinking it for a long time. But it felt good to finally say it. "One day, maybe. But we just aren't there yet."

"Indeed." Laurent concurred. "Chrom thrives on competition; without it he grew negligent and detached. Robin was correct to challenge his rule. But the manner of her choosing was error; in so choosing she has all but guaranteed that Vaike will be our next Exalt. Vaike will win not because of who had the strongest endorsement or the best policies or the tightest image control or the cleanest messaging. He has none of these things. Vaike will win because the mood of the

country is nativist, populist, and anti-elitist. And he plainly without reservation or deceit reflects the mood of the country."

"And you're okay with that? ***OOF***—" Nah staggered and hit the floor. "You're way too smart to be okay with that…" She didn't even bother getting up.

"A Vaike governorship would not be as disastrous as the alarmists are predicting. Precisely because he has no leadership skills or experience in government." Laurent picked her up and whispered words of comfort and carried her to a backroom bed, where she could sleep off the coming crash. "Vaike does not know how to craft laws or move through the mechanisms of state; he will be almost entirely dependent on aides and advisers to do the legwork of governing. Mother has already taken measures to assure that in the event of a Vaike win, her think-tank will have a hand in crafting public policy. Chrom and Robin will likewise retain some role; if not in name or title then in the ability to treat with the hierarchs and move legislation. In truth, Vaike would be Exalt in name only. The people would have their voice sitting Chrom's throne and be contented in the illusion of autonomy. But the direction of the country would not change."

"Mmmmmmm…that sounds nice…" Nah gripped her pillow tight and snuggled beneath her blankets as Laurent tucked her in. "You're the best boyfriend ***ever***."

"You're drunk." Laurent gave her a gentle kiss and made sure she was comfortable. "You really shouldn't try to drink as much as your father."

"NO! I'm TOUGH! I can handle it!" Nah made that face she made when she was trying to prove she was a big, scary dragon.

"You can. But you really shouldn't." Laurent blew out the rooms oil lamp. "Get some rest. I'll be back in a bit."

"Noooooooo." Nah whined. "Why are you leaving?"

"I have…business…" *I'll tell you more if mother allows it.* "Get some rest."

Nah dozed off and Laurent left…only to immediately be accosted…

"...You..." Lucina cornered him as soon as he left the tavern. "***The King*** would like a word with you."

"Whats this about?" Laruent feigned ignorance.

"What do you think?"

"I would assume this pertains to mother's assistance with his campaign. Would it not be more prudent to speak with her directly?"

"No. He specifically asked to speak with ***YOU***."

He knows. "And why ever would our good king do that?"

"Ask him yourself." Lucina knew Miriel was double-dealing, and she knew Laruent was her in with Team Vaike. "Shall I escort you to the castle?"

"…I know the way…" Laurent proceeded without her direction, but was very aware that he was being followed.

I could use a big, scary dragon right about now.

Chapter 11: Chapter 11

A number of fan suggestions came together to make this chapter happen. Special thanks to RubyGloom7 and Dudeaga.

Robin For Exalt

"Marijuana is not a drug. I used to suck dick for coke. Now that's an addiction, man. You ever sucked some dick for marijuana? I didn't think so." -Bob Saget-

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"I understand you're working for Vaike." Chrom got straight to the point.

"I do no such thing, and I find almost all of his policies to be abhorrent." Laurent denied it. "I'm simply dating his daughter."

"But you have been spending a LOT of time with his campaign team?"

"Calling it a ***team*** is being extremely generous." *More of a mob, really.*

"Rambling Vaike supporters just stormed my throne room and demanded to know why I want to push their grandparents off a cliff…I don't suppose you know what that's about…"

"Vaike misinterpreted the rule removing claims arising under the Affordable Healer Act from the court of common pleas," Laurent explained. "He was unaware that its standard practice for complex statutes to create their own enforcement agencies with their own administrative law judges and courts of limited jurisdiction. His interpretation was that a hierarch could deny vital services with no judicial oversight or review on-the-record, if one so much as offended his family name."

"I signed the law, and I don't understand most of what you just said."

"That would be one of the fundamental problems with the law." Laurent opined. *Vaike can be an imbecile, but the people who make our laws really should have some idea what they do.* "At its outset the premise was flawed. If you wanted healing to be affordable you had to govern against the interests of the insurers making it unaffordable. Write them out of the equation; not make more people use their product and accept without contention that the product is a prerequisite to access. All you've done is create a cost-shifting mechanism to hide the inflated expense."

"That's what Robin said. And if we had followed her plan there would have been NO change in the law, because the hierarchs never would have let a proposal against the interest of insurers see the light of day," this Chrom understood. "Some change is better than no change. You understand this, don't you? How this game is played? That's why you've been playing all sides and hedging your bets with every campaign…"

"…Your Majesty…I would never…"

"There's no need to deny it." Chrom wasn't mad. "*Nothing will really change. Who advises counts for more than who governs. Vaike won't be so bad so long as he is surrounded by* ***the right people***. This is what you have been thinking, yes?"

"Your...insights...are uncanny."

"I'm not half as dumb as Robin would have you believe. Now listen and listen well. Vaike will pay no heed to one who speaks to him of facts and theories, and the only opinion Robin trusts is her own. With Vaike your knowledge will be as pearls before swine, and with Robin it will be ridiculed and ignored. I will listen. I will be moved. Pledge for me, and I will raise you to Grandmaster of the Realm."

"You're trying to buy my support with patronage." Laurent saw through the ploy.

"***Patronage*** is such a dirty word," Chrom laid on the charm. "Don't get me wrong. I'm not handing out positions of power to every fence-sitting Maribelle. I seek only the best and brightest to give my counsel. It is out of ***deepest respects*** for what you would bring to my administration that I extend this offer."

"What about mother?"

"what about her?"

"Why me and not her?"

"Miriel lacks the social intelligence to be a public figure. She'd be suitable for a behind-the-scenes job in policy research and law review, but it wouldn't do to have her as a diplomat or as a liaison," Chrom had considered it. "You're the full package."

"And Robin?"

"…Can no longer serve as my right hand after openly contesting my throne. I'll knight her and give her Frederick's old post—Lord Commander of the Ylissean Guard is as good a use for her as any—but her grandmaster days are over."

"...I see…" Laurent needed some time to gather his thoughts. "May I…have a moment to think this through?"

"**YOU JUST WAIT TILL I TELL YOUR FATHER!"** Sumia came in shouting,

"**Ow-Ow-OW!"** Cynthia cried from Maribelle pulling her by the ear.

"You are in **BIG** trouble mister!" Maribelle ignored Cynthia and scolded her son; also being pulled by the ear.

"Awwww; come on Ma! Everyone does it; its no big deal!" Brady grumbled.

"You think it over while I see what this is about." Chrom sighed and turned his attention to family affairs. "What happened?"

"You are not going to believe what Frederick caught our children doing!" Maribelle huffed. "This behavior is totally *UNACCEPTABLE*!"

"Cynthia and Brady? Damn." it sounded to Chrom as though he had just lost a bet. "I owe you 100 gold Sumia. I thought for sure he was gay..."

"Why does everybody think that!? I'm just sensitive!"

"What!? No…we didn't catch them doing ***THAT***!" Maribelle did that thing she does where she turns beat-red. "My idiot son and your daughter were smoking marijuana cigarettes. *Reefer*. Like…like common ***hoodlums***!" She was SO mad.

"…Nice..." Chrom had new-found respect for Brady. "Do you still have any?"

"**CHROM!**" Sumia lowered the boom on him.

"Oh…right…I mean *I Raised You better then That!* I'm really disappointed…or something…"

"This is serious!" Sumia insisted. Maribelle had her all worked up. "Our daughter is a drug addict!"

"***Bullshit*** our daughter is a drug addict. She smokes weed." Chrom could care less. Its not like she was getting hopped up on pills or snorting powder. "You don't do any real drugs, do you honey?"

"Nope!"

"…There ya go…"

"Marijuana is ILLEGAL!" Maribelle lectured. "Its dangerous and unhealthy and low-class, and people who need to use it to be happy are ***losers***."

"You don't do it because you need it to be happy. You do it because its fun." Cynthia said something so simple, it was brilliant.

"Same reason you drink wine with them socialites; ain't no one calling you a loser." Brady agreed.

"Wine is *sophisticated*!" Maribelle failed to see the similarity.

"And it isn't ***ILLEGAL***." Sumia added.

"You do know the only reason marijuana is illegal is so that we can justify having as many lawmen as we have and keep poor people in prison, right?" Chrom knew Cynthia and Brady had nothing to fear from being caught; they were highborn. If Frederick had found two street kids lighting up, they'd be spending the next 19 months in prison. Or dead for "resisting arrest."

"Oh don't even START with that!" Sumia had married Chrom with an explicit understanding that certain things were going

to change when he became a father. "Just because you were a full-blown degenerate when you dated Robin, doesn't mean you can teach my little girl that…"

"Kids; do you want to know the truth about Marijuana?" Sumia had just flipped Chrom's **Brutally Honest** switch. "Its…its just GREAT. It makes food taste better. It makes music sound better. It makes sex feel better. Gods; it makes sex feel ***SO*** much better. Its less impairing then alcohol and doesn't make you throw up or want to hit something. People have been using it for thousands of years to make life better."

"OKAY;well…this has been...oh my, look at the time!" Maribelle excused herself. "Come Brady, you really shouldn't be listening to such..."

"Stay. Your king commands it." Chrom pulled rank.

"If that's how it is, why is it illegal?" Chrom had Brady's attention.

"The first criminalization laws were passed shortly after the end of Taguel slavery," Chrom explained. "It became illegal to take away their rights and force them to work for nothing outright. But forced labor was still allowed in prisons. Well eventually the hierarchs figured out that if they made a law which criminalized something everyone was doing and selectively enforced it against the underclass, they could stop the Taguel from climbing the social ladder AND fill Ylisse's prisons with so many bodies that chain-gangs could do the work of former slaves."

"Don't listen to any of this." Maribelle told Brady. "Smoking is bad for you."

"So is getting blackout drunk on whiskey and passing out in a bar, but you don't go to jail for it!" Brady shot back. "There's no more taguel. Or chain-gangs. Why is it still illegal?"

"Those were just local laws. The national ban didn't come until the reign of Exalt Mikolos IV." ***Fuck that Guy***. Chrom had no love for that particular ancestor. "When Mikolos ordered the first crusade against Plegia, half of Ylisse applauded his efforts to combat the Grimleal threat. And half the country called it the senseless violence of a mad zealot. There was protest and civil unrest and a deep rift in the mood of the country; some abandoned the Ylissean way altogether and formed their own communes where they did no business with the guilds and paid no homage to The Crown. Technically, they weren't doing anything illegal. But Mikolos wanted them punished. Mikolos noticed something: all of the Ylisseans who were running away to join hippy communes and showing up outside his palace calling him a murderer were smoking weed. If smoking weed were illegal, he could lawfully disband their communes and disrupt their protests. Thinking this, Mikolos declared marijuana use to be a national crisis and its users to be violent criminals. The rest, as they say, is history."

"That's ***SO*** wrong! Someone should do something about that!" Cynthia thought the whole thing was very unheroic. "You're The King! Why don't you just make it legal?"

"The last time I tried, the hierarchs threatened to disinherit my entire bloodline." It wans't as though Chrom hadn't made the attempt. "…Wait a damn minute…Robin got rid of bloodright to the throne with this democracy business. My whole bloodline is already disinherited."

"…"

"…"

"…"

"SWEET! I can legalize weed! Laurent; with me!"

"I suddenly find myself most inclined to take up the position of grandmaster." Laurent was agreeable to the change of law. "Good sir Brady; see if Gaius still has any of that Big Bubba Budz Master Kush. I'll tell Kjelle to spread the word. We shall celebrate this triumph with festivities of exceeding excellence!"

...And then they were gone…

"Laurent and Kjelle smoke!?" Maribelle and Sumia and were dumbfounded.

"Yep yep yep! Ummmm…Why wouldn't they?" Cynthia was that silly combination of cheerful and confused that made her Cynthia.

"Laurent…isn't a low-class degenerate…" Maribelle couldn't wrap her head around it. "He's educated. And really, really smart."

"Everyone from our generation smokes weed." Brady informed his elders.

"Kjelle is an ***athlete***." Sumia couldn't imagine the girl allowing such abuse of her perfectly conditioned body. "Does Sully know?"

"Everyone from our generation smokes weed."

"...Not Lucina..."

"***EVERYONE*** from our generation smokes weed."

Chapter 12: Chapter 12

Throwing curveballs with Chrom.

Robin For Exalt

"***Compromise is the Artistry of Democracy."*** –Gutmann and Thompsan-

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"**No**." Hierarch Haggerty took a plain look at the cover of Chrom's proposal and refused to make it law.

"Its good policy!" Chrom defended his push for legalization. "It creates jobs, saves money, takes money away from the bandits on the Plegian border…the revenue they make from black market sales is revenue *WE* should be making to fund the Ylissean Guard…"

"It is unhealthy, unnatural, and ungodly!" Hiearch Benedictus rebuked.

"Tiki; Is it ungodly?" Chrom asked his resident godspeaker.

"Naga hath said: ***BEHOLD! I have given every herb bearing seed which is upon the face of all the Earth, and every tree in which is the fruit of the tree yielding seed. For you it shall be meat***."

"Willfully altering one's state of mind for pleasure is a sacrilege of the body. We will not invite our people to indulge in such immorality." Hierarch Amberos joined.

"…The Voice of the Divine Dragon just told you it isn't immoral…"

"Since the days of Mikolos IV, we hath said that this plant is a drug and a poison worse than kingsbane." Hiearch Manderly pondered. "If we were to reverse—if we were to say our judgement was made in error—the people would question all our rules. The authority of our most holy church would be uncertain; the faith shaken and our goodness, the virtue of Ylisse, unfollowed."

"I'm sorry…I thought we were running a church based on the teachings of The Divine Dragon, not on what makes followers easier to control." Chrom called them all out. "Look; our kids get it. The law doesn't make sense and none of the reasons we give them for why it is what it is hold water. They're going to change it in the next 20 years if we don't, and history will judge use for standing in the way."

"Degenerate youth will be degenerate youth." Hiearch Benedictus was unmoved. "Those who partake of this poison are lacking of character and amount to nothing."

"Lazy, stupid, and unmotivated." Hierach Amberos agreed.

"These ***children*** will become burnouts if they stay their course; wisemen and counselors if they grow up. They change nothing." Hierarch Manderly talked down.

"…About that…" Chrom was prepared for this. "Laurent; if you would."

"*Gentleman*." Laurent presented himself.

"***Hierarchs***." Benedictus corrected.

"How ***Rude***." Amberose was indignant.

"We work ***hard*** for our titles. " Manderly lied (they did no such thing). "Address us properly, or do not address us at all."

"State your name title for the record." Haggerty sighed. This was supposed to be an easy ***No***.

"Sage Laurent—Emeritus Scholar at the University of Ylisstol—son of Ricken; scion of the most noble and ancient House Do-Urden. I hold a masters degree in public administration and a doctorate in advanced elemental studies.I have an IQ of 162. I've been published in three journals. My academic record is immaculate. This is *Gandalf the Grey*." Laurent produced a pipe of the kind smoked by the wizard which bore its namesake. "We are consumers of the controlled substance *Cannabis*, which the government of Ylisstol has said makes users lazy and stupid and unmotivated."

"You are admitting to the commission of a Class 1 felony. Think very carefully if you want to continue this testimony."

Haggerty attempted to intimidate him into silence.

"I will issue a full royal pardon for any criminal charges arising out of the subject matter of this hearing." Chrom nulled the threat. "Proceed."

Laurent delivered his prepared testimony:

"*In the future from which I hail, Grima awakens Armageddon and pushes the human race to the brink of extinction. There's no governing states or sovereigns and a complete breakdown of law and order . Survival groups promulgate rules of conduct, enforcing them only as necessary to procure the social utility of cooperative survival. Drug laws were among the first rules of the old nations to be abandoned; the enforcement costs were deemed prohibitive and the social utility of enforcement was comparatively low.*

In the absence of such laws, consumption of cannaboids fell into the same class of cultural attitudes and social acceptance as consumption of alcohols. Cannaboids became the preferred means of leisure during the Desolation Years, when food shortages required strict rationing of fermentable fruits and grains and commercial brewing became infeasible.

As a logistics officer in the human resistance, I observed the conduct of hundreds of men. I found that cannaboid usage generally served as a supplement rather than as a complement to alcohol usage. That is to say, alcohol usage declined as cannaboid usage rose in the alternative. I found less socially undesirable behavior among those who consumed cannaboids then among those who consumed alcohol in comparable quantities; specifically fewer instances of aggressive outbursts and violence against fellow survivors. Moreover, cannaboid users were less likely to manifest symptoms of post-traumatic stress after Risen attacks. The free availability of cannaboids among lawful vendors was such that criminal enterprises could not claim control of cannaboid markets as a source of wealth.

In this timeline, I have found glaring deficiencies in the current law. The rate at which criminalization is enforced across income brackets is not commensurate with the rates at which they are used; enforcement is overwhelmingly biased against the poor and the disenfranchised while more comfortably situated users rarely face legal consequence. Moreover, bandit clans in cannabis-growing regions have become exceptionally well funded and well armed through a de-facto monopoly on its production and distribution. Our policy continues to be a prime driver of the gang wars in Plegia and the violence on the Plegain border. A lawful cannabis market would defund the bandits, create Ylissean jobs, and decrease the cost of law enforcement by 12 percent while increasing revenue for public works .

"*…I will now elaborate on each point…"*

"Compelling testimony."Haggerty mock-applauded Laurent's meticulous presentation. **"No."**

"By what operation of fact?" Laurent inquired.

"The law says the Exalt cannot amend the Prohibition Act without the consent of the High Council." Haggerty spoke for the hierarchs. "We hold that it is a crime of moral turpitude and that you have admitted to breaking our laws. GUARDS! ARREST THIS MISCREANT!"

"That's a damn-shame." Chrom tabled the amendments to his proposal. "…I guess you don't want to hear about the tax cuts for top earners…"

"**Tax cuts for what-now?"** That sent the council abuzz.

"…Oh…nothing major….It's just that with so much gold from a sales tax on pot-shops, we wouldn't really need a 20 percent capital gain tax. I think we could drop it down to 10 percent."

"**10 percent!?"**

"No…that's far too modest…*FIVE* …" Chrom sweetened the deal. "We can go five percent on capital gains."

"**We must legalize weed immediately!"**Hierarch Manderly jumped out of his seat.

"**It is unpatriotic to block legalizaiton!"** Hierarch Amberos pounded the table.

"**I was the first one who wanted to legalize weed!"** Hierarch Benedictus boasted proudly.

"…Lord Counselor…" Chrom mock-asked Hierarch Haggerty for his consent. His support had been pulled out from under him and he knew it; it was done.

"…Hmmmmphhh…you have your law…" Haggerty yielded. "Marijuana is now legal."

"Sages take note; that's how you govern." Chrom debriefed Laurent after the hearing. "Scholarship and facts will only take you so far. There comes a point where you just need to be able to read people and figure out what they want. Give a little; get a little."

"Masterfully done." Laurent praised. "And yet…does it not bother you?"

"What bother me?"

"That buying friends with political favors counts for more than who has the better policy argument?"

"This isn't University. If you think that way, you will never get anything done around here."

"…Hmmmppphhh…"

"Chrom just gave his millionaire buddies the biggest tax cut in the history of Ylisse! He's SO out of touch!" Robin roused the rabble, with great success.

"…what the fuck…" Chrom confronted her after the rally. "You of all people should be thrilled."

"Oh; I'm ***ecstatic***."

"They weren't going to change the law without a concession and we more than make up the revenue in sales tax. You know this."

"Of course I know this. As you know that we're still in the middle of an election, I'm still trying to kick your ass, and ***no tax cuts for millionaires*** is the easiest applause line in politics." Robin had been fucked too many times by bumpkins not knowing the difference between good slogans and good policy to not take advantage when the perfect opportunity presented itself.

"…Hmmmpphhhhh…"

"Politics aside; there's something serious I wanted to talk to you about. Have you been following the crisis in Renais?"

"...No idea what that is..."

"Renais; it's a country in the Magvel region. It was just an invaded by its neighbor, Grado. They killed the king and sacked the capital. The atrocities were…barbaric…"

"That's horrible."

"Their armies are garbage. Two generations behind the Ylissean Guard in metalworking and spellcraft; we could rout them in a week. The people would greet us as liberators." Robin baited.

"…I suppose it wouldn't hurt to send a battalion…"

"NO! THIS IS WHY YOU SUCK AT YOUR JOB!" Robin scolded. "You can't keep throwing gold at frivolous things. We have absolutely no reason to go to war in Renais."

"But…you just said…"

"…What every hawkish adviser looking for something to do after Plegia and Valm is going to tell you. And you just listened to me. Because YOU SUCK AT YOUR JOB!"

"Its not frivolous if people are suffering and we have the power to stop it!" Chrom disagreed.

"You know how this works: evil king invades; young champion rises; champion leads army against evil king. Trust me. Renisians will work out trouble in Renais without the great King Chrom raising a batallion."

"Laurent; do you know of this?" Chrom sought a second opinion.

"I am familiar with the Renisian Incident, your grace."

"What say you?"

"There are ill tidings of demons of mass destruction in Grado. It might be another Grima scenario. I believe it would be prudent to gather more intelligence before taking military action off the table."

"What it is *he* doing here?" Robin asked.

"This is the Grandmaster of the Realm. " Chrom introduced Robin to her replacement.

"***I'm*** Grandmaster of the Realm."

"You're fired."

"YOU'RE REPLACING ME WITH LAURENT!?"

"Noooo. In fact, I'm *PROMOTING* you to Lord Commander of the Ylissean Guard."

"...I don't want Frederick's old job…" Lord Commander of the Ylissean Guard was a completely useless position. Unless Ylisse was going to war.

"AND I'm sending an exploratory party to Renais. By order of the exalt, the new Lord Commander of the Ylissean Guard and her First Lieutenant are going to be leading an overseas campaign. Far, far away from here."

"No…Don't you dare…i mean, you can't even...not without the hierarchs..."

"Hierarchs have no authority over military decisions; I can do whatever I want. LAURENT! Inform Vaike that he has been promoted to first Lieutenant of the Ylissean Guard. Get him a nice new axe to mark the achievement. Reforged Brave; make it fancy.""

"YOU UNBELIEVABLE BASTARD!"

"…Bye…"

Chapter 13: Chapter 13

So I didn't write Vaike's character intending for him to be a representation of any real political figure. He was just supposed to be a caricature of American populism. But if you happened to see Governor Mike Huckabee talking about his new book "God, Guns, Grits, and Gravy" on the January 19th episode of the Daily Show. OMG...its Vaike... ("The way that you use the term *Harvard* as a derogative blows my mind.")

If you didn't see it; Youtube "John Stewart Confronts Mike Huckabee over Hypocritical Beyonce Remarks." Its worth 7 minutes of your time.

I love it when things just line up like that.

Robin For Exalt

"Mission Accomplished." -George W. Bush-

Well this sucks. Robin was stuck on Magvel. With Vaike. Doing things that were not running for Exalt.

"*Nyah-heh*. I like it here!" Henry blew up a giant spider.

"Gregor confused. Chrom sending us to hunt demons or liberate Renais; what is mission?" Gregor didn't understand their marching orders.

"Both?" Robin guessed. Chrom hadn't really given them a mission. *Why would he? A mission statement would mean an endgame and return date.* "HENRY; Stop wasting tomes!" (Chrom hadn't given them much in the way of supplies either)

"Tharja already broke five thunders." Libra advised.

"Tharja is harvesting gargoyle wings and eye of mogall for witching power. Henry is just being weird."

"But the spiders make funny popping noises when they die!" Henry used novice necromancy to make a dead one give him a hug.

"You're so weird. STOP BEING WEIRD!" Robin shouted.

"Oh, get off it. He's having fun. Naga knows we've got nothing better to do; there's no reason for us to be here." Gaius said what they were all thinking.

"Teach can't believe what he's hearing; none of ya'll are taking this mission seriously!"

"There is no ***mission***. Chrom is being petty." Tharja had been following Robin's campaign with stalkerish interest. She knew what was going on.

"HEY! Politics is politics, but when the boots hit the ground you gotta support the troops! World is better off then its ever been because of Ylissean soldiers spreading Ylissean values."

"You thought *Chromcare* was a conspiracy and an abuse of power." Gaius found it strange that Vaike, of all people, was the one who WASN'T raising a stink about out-of-control government doing something it had no business doing. "You don't think this is dirty?"

"Chromcare is an abuse of power; ain't government's job to get involved in healing. Ain't never been government's job. Raising armies and fighting wars; that's what Exalts are ***supposed*** to do! Don't ya know? Damn; you guys now a whole lot of nothing…" Vaike was still Vaike. "Exploitin' war for politics and bashing the mission 'cause you got a beef with Chrom. That's just downright unpatriotic."

"Vaike; stop talking, before I murder you." Robin was in no mood. "Tharja; whats the word from our eyes in the sky?"

"We don't have eyes in the sky." Tharja reminded her.

"Why?"

"Sumia is playing housewife, Cherche is back in Rosanne, and Cordelia thinks you should be sodomized with a killer lance."

"Because its *MY* fault Severa makes poor life choices. SOMEONE PUT OVILIA ON A GODDAMN PEGASUS AND GET ME GODDAMN EYES IN THE SKY!" Robin raged.

"We didn't bring a pegasus." Libra once more advised. "That is to say, Chrom didn't give us any."

"No; of course not. That would be generous." Robin stewed. "So we have no objective, no supply lines, and we're going in blind…fantastic…"

"We'll have something to go on when Sully and Stahl report in." Gaius reminded her. "And come on. We're badasses. There's nothing out there that can even—***OWWWWWW*; MY BODY!**"

Gaius turned to stone.

"GAIUS!"

"HOLY SHIT!"

"WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT!"

"Huh. That was…a thing that happened…" Robin, really, really wished she had eyes in the sky. "THARJA! Explain!"

"Gorgons. Their hexes turns you to stone. I want one." Tharja admired the monster's handiwork.

"Nya-hah we could have left him back in the capital if all hes gonna do is get *STONED*, nya-hah." Henry stopped playing with spiders just long enough to make a bad pun.

"See; this is what I was tellin ya. The mission is a serious thing. When you're too busy being a snarky lib—"

"Vaike; move six paces to the right please." Robin cut him off.

"Why do you want me to…"

"Do it." The tactician commanded, and Vaike could not refuse.

"Now three paces back."

"Here?"

"…A little bit more to the right…"

"If ya want Teach to put his axe to something, just say the—***OWWWWW; MY BODY!***"

Vaike turned to stone.

"Right then. New plan." Robin sent a bolt of Thoron into the hills and sniped out the offending gorgon. "We kill a few monsters. We drive a few soldiers out of Serafew. We bullshit an incident report for Chrom, file ***No Further need for Ylissean involvement***, and we all go home."

"…and if we find something that actually needs Ylissean involvement?" Libra asked.

"Ignore it, leave it to the Renasians, and deal with it if it ever comes to Ylisse." Robin still had a mind for goverrning. The Ylissean economy was in the middle of a weak recovery and the debt of two wars remained unpaid. Getting bogged down in another campaign would be disasterous. "If things look like they're escalating: disengage, disengage, disengage. We do not want to get entangled in—whatever this is—so for the LOVE OF GOD, don't do anything rash."

"Back!" Sully and Stahl rode into camp covered in blood and carrying the severed head of Vigarde. "We killed the Emperor of Grado!"

Its good to be the King. Chrom didn't have a care in the world.

"You're just going to sit on the couch drinking mojitos all day?" Chrom was useless, and Lucina was offended.

"The recovery is chugging along, Laurent is handling my petitioners, and for the first time in three months Robin isn't up my ass. Soooooo…yes….yes I am..." King Chrom was unapologetic.

"..."

"Drink with your old man?" Chrom offered up a cocktail.

"…Its 2:00 on a Tuesday…" Lucina, like a normal person, had shit to do.

"Its 5:00 somewhere in the world."

"Don't you have a country to run? There has to be more to do around here since you…you know…**started a WAR to stall out challenges to the Ylissean Thrones.**" Lucina did not hide her displeasure with the decision.

"You really think that's why I did it?" Chrom sipped and swirled. "Oh sure; getting some distance from Robin was a nice perk. I don't deny it. But that's no reason to go to war. The truth of it is the people of Renais were suffering and we had the power to stop it. Yes; Ylisse had no national interest in intervention. But wat about human interest? There's more power in the Ylissean Guard then all the world's armies combined. When we see injustice and cruelty, do we not have an obligation to use that power as a global force for good?"

"That's great. Except you didn't even know Renais was a country…until like…five day ago…" Lucina rebuked. *Gods. This is where Cynthia gets it from.* "You can't just play hero with the Ylissean Guard. You need to understand the places your sending them and what you're sending them into. Or you may think you're fighting injustice and cruelty…but really…you're just escalating conflicts and spreading more violence."

"Well said," Chrom praised. "You will make a fine Exalt one day."

"Do we even know WHY Grado invaded Renais?" Lucina was not falling for Chrom's charm offensive.

"We know that when they invaded, they murdered fifty thousand civilians and raped the king's daughter in front of him. So I don't particularly care WHY they did it. I care that they did it, and that they were going to keep doing it."

"It just really bothers me that you didn't put more thought into this." Lucina accepted the drink. She needed it. "There's SO many ways this can go horribly out-of-control."

"Come on; this is *Robin* we're talking about. Everything down to who carries silver and who carries steel is going to be controlled."

A letter bearing Robin's seal appeared from Chrom's royal carrier.

"See? That's probably her writing to let us know she made landfall. Wow…that was awfully fast…" Chrom opened and read:

Chrom,

Made the crossing in a-day-and-a-half. We can use wind magic on our own ships to increase travel speed; don't know why we've never thought of that before. Please find attached casting formulas and vector calcs, and forward to Miriel.

Demonic activity in Magvel is higher than expected. The cause is yet unknown. Attempts at scouting have been frustrated by lack of air power. Send a pegasus next time, asshole.

Manpower is limited. We've recruited Renaisian resistance fighters, but they're ill equipped and poorly trained. Prince Ephraim and Princess Eirika lead them. Weird relationship; possibly incestuous.

Prince Ephraim was abroad during the first invasion, and Princess Eirika escaped during the castle siege. Reports of rape in the throne room appear to have been fabricated; likely as anti-Grado propoganda. Confirmed civilian death count is 2,500. You suck at your job.

Will keep you posted with further updates. Try not to fuck up too badly while I'm gone.

XOXOXO,
Robin :)

P.S.—We accidently killed the Emperor of Grado. Situation developing.

"…"

"…"

"…"

"…"

"How do you *accidentally* kill an Emperor?" Chrom wondered allowed.

"HOW DO YOU ACCIDENTALLY KILL AN EMPEROR!?" Robin screamed through the work of attaching neck bolts to Vigarde's corpse. Henry reattached the severed head and Tharja chanted.

"He wasn't wearing special armor. We thought he was just a general." Sully told her.

"There were these soldiers. Raping and pillaging and doing soldier stuff. So we just started beating on them. Sully took the head off the one in the lead and they were like…dude…you just killed the Emperor…" Stahl was way to calm.

"We killed them too. Soooo..yeah…no one knows the Emperor is dead yet…" Sully clarified.

"Then this might actually work." Robin cast thunder on the neckbolts. Tharja finished her hex, and the reanimated corpse of Emperor Vigarde walked.

"There is zero chance that this will actually work." Tharja did not like this plan.

"He doesn't have to look pretty. He just has to walk and grunt." Robin watched their creation do just that. "We sit him on the throne next to a hexmage or a shadow priest or some shit. They give *Emperor's Orders* and he grunts agreement. That's what people do in this country, right?"

"...Urrghhhh…" Vigarde's corpse grunted.

"See? This will—OH GOD'S NO!"

Half of Vigarde's lower jaw fell out of its hinge. His corpse grunted and clawed at itself and bashed its head against a rock, trying to end its misery.

"…I think I'm going to be sick…" Olivia paled and covered her mouth.

"You have sinned against nature." Libra passed judgment.

"Kill it." unstoned Gaius advised. "Kill it with fire."

"Yeah. This was a really bad idea." Robin admitted and cast Bolognone. "FUCK. Now we have to stay."

"Why?" Gaius didn't understand.

"Because we just destroyed Grado's government, and now there's going to be anarchy." Robin explained. "Had we just routed their army out of Renais and given them a stern *don't do it again*, we could leave. If we bail out now and Grado goes to hell, we get the blame and we've just inspired a generation of hatred against Ylisse. It'll be the Plegaian Crusades all-over-again."

"…but if we overstay and we're seen as meddlers, we also inspire a generation of hatred against Ylisse." Gaius pointed out.

"It's a real quagmire!" Vaike used the biggest word he knew. "But there ain't no two ways about it! We have to stay!"

"Because *limited government*?" Robin mocked.

"No. 'Cause we gotta finish the mission!"

"This was never part of the mission; there was no mission. But since you're so adamant…" Robin got an evil glimmer in her eye. "Vaike; I am naming you acting governor of occupied Grado."

"FOR REALS!?" Vaike did not realize what she was trying to do.

"For reals. You will be in charge of reconstruction and maintaining law and order. I'll deliver my assessment to King Chrom and return with word of his command. You ARE capable of governing in my absence, yes? "

"Ha! Just you wait and see! Ol' Teach'll have this place running smooth as a manakete's bottom."

"Excellent." Robin took her leave. But not before pulling Tharja aside and whispering *I don't care how many hexes you*

have to put him under; keep him in line.

"…soooooo Governor Vaike…" Stahl wondered. "How do you think that's gonna work out?"

"I think Grado would have been better off with Robin's Frankenstein." Sully opined. "And I don't think she's coming back."

Chapter 14: Chapter 14

Robin for Exalt

"Speak softly and carry a big stick." –Theodore Roosevelt-

"First Priority?" Robin quizzed Tharja to make sure she knew her role.

"Maintain law and order."

"Second Priority?"

"Put Grado back on the road to self-governance."

"If the locals revolt against Ylissean receivership?"

"Put them down with locals that will ally with Ylissse in exchange for influence in the reconstruction government. Do not be seen as moving Ylisseans against them and killing locals with Ylissean soldiers."

"And if Vaike starts acting up?"

"Hex him until he coughs up locusts." Tharja had a never-before available stock of gargoyle wings, and quite a few new spells she was itching to try with them.

"To be clear; I'm leaving you in charge." Robin needed a follower of sharp mind and unwavering loyalty and Tharja fit the bill. A continent away from the eyes of Ylisstol she did not have to worry about the optics of counting a Plegian witch among her most trusted confidants, and could finally find a use for her. "Vaike is just the face of the occupation government. You're the brains."

"To be clear; you made Vaike think he was the brains just to make him stay. You intend to return to Ylisse and run against Chrom unopposed." Tharja saw how the pieces fit. "So Vaike can't be the brains. But I have to make him *THINK* he's the brains. He can't know that he's just the face."

"Tharja; If you were a man I would have your babies." Robin was only half joking.

"We…can actually make that happen…"

"No we can't."

"The effects would only be temporary," Tharja produced an orange vial from her potions stash. "But I could endow myself long enough to perform the feat."

"...You mean give yourself a…"

"Yes."

Kinky. "Lets put that down for a ***maybe*** and come back to it after the election." *Do I really want to piss Libra off that badly?* Robin mulled it over as she put the vial back in its place "…Goodness…there's a lot of potions in here. All of them do something different?"

"Every one." Tharja boasted. "The red one sends you into a blind rage. The brown one turns your hair into snakes. The pink one covers you in eyeballs. The blue one makes you commit adultery. The green one…"

"Woah, Woah, Woah…back up. The blue one does ***what***?"

"It causes the drinker to be overcome with lust and make sweet, passionate love to whosoever tempts him."

"…"

"Robin?"

"No. That's too mean." Robin briefly entertained a horrendously evil idea and then decided against it. "I'm trying to dethrone Chrom. Not destroy his marriage."

"When have you ever needed to TRY to destroy his marriage?"

"*Good morning. Good moorrnniinnng. What a wonderful day. Good morning. Good morning to you*." Chrom came down in his morning bathrobe and drank his morning coffee with the sing-song jolliness of a man well sexed. There was something about having his sneaky ex-girlfriend out of the castle and on the other side of the world that had Sumia friskier than usual.

"…Stop doing that..." Lissa grumbled. Donnel was back on the campaign trail, now stumping for Chrom, and her bed had been husbandless for what was coming up on two weeks straight. She could not be less enthused.

"We need to get Robin out of the castle more often. " Chrom went on, oblivious. "I cannot remember the last time Sumia did that thing with the feather-duster."

"…I'm sure it was great…"

"Its like this giant cloud over our marriage has been lifted, you know? Last night she even let me..."

"If you don't stop, I'm going to tell you every single place ***I've*** 'used the feather-duster.' Starting with that kitchen-top."

"Finnneee." Chrom backed away from the kitchen-top. "Hmph; Someone's grumpy today…"

"…I wonder why…"

Chrom, still oblivious, took his jolliness to the living room.

"Yo." Robin gave her most informal greeting. She sat on the King's couch, drinking the King's mojitos and smoking the King's kush.

"Yo." Chrom hollered back, before realizing who it was he was speaking to and spitting out his coffee. "ROBIN!?"

"Do you think Libra knows his wife prefers women and is only attracted to him because he looks like one, or is he still in denial?" Robin puffed thoughtfully and reclined and said the first thing that came to her mind. "Nice bathrobe, dork."

"You're supposed to be in Renais!"

"Yes…well…you wouldn't know anything about that now, would you?" Robin blew out a cloud of smoke that could pass for dragonbreath. "Remind me. The deceased King of Renais is…who again?"

"…Errrrrrr…Frito?"

"…that's a salted corn chip…"

"Fargo?"

"…"

"Frodo?"

"...You don't even know his name." Robin chided, and chucked an incident report at the Exalt. "This is everything we know about the situation in Magvel. Renais is stable. Grado won't be invading another neighbor anytime soon. We're still researching the demon manifestations. The locals believe it to be the work of a fel creature called Fomortis. Honestly… its none of our business, and if he ever comes to Ylisse a good taste of Falchion will send him packing. He's no Grima."

"…You want me to send 10,000 soldiers to Magvel to maintain law and order in Gardo?" Chrom reviewed Robin's report.

"I believe this to be the bare minimum necessary to prevent an anti-Ylissean insurgency from claiming territory and developing area-denial capabilities. We…kinda sorta butchered Grado's central government…"

"***10,000 soldiers!?"***

"…Hey…this was your idea…" Robin didn't like it either. "I told you we never should have gone in to Magvel to begin with. But now that we did we can't just walk in, break it, and leave."

"Why the hell not!?"

"Because that's what your grand-pappy did to Plegia, and that's where Gangrels come from."

"…"

"You want another Gangrel?"

"…I don't want another Gangrel…"

"Then Ylissean intervention in Magvel can't end with Grado broken and whatever faction that hates us most for breaking it rising to power." Robin instructed. "You made the commitment. Do it right, or don't do it at all."

"I'll give you 500 soldiers."

"That's not going to be enough."

"That's one battalion. I told you; I could send one battalion."

"One battalion will hold the Imperial City. We'll need twenty times that number to be mobile across the empire's reach."

"Use Magvelian recruits."

"And who, pray tell, is going to train them?"

"You need 10,000 troops for *training exercises*?"

"I need 10,000 troops to convince trainees that we're serious, and that they should train with us instead of with the insurgents."

"I cannot give you 10,000 soldiers."

"…"

"Not 10,000 *Ylissean* soldiers. I'll consult Regna Ferox and Chon'sin . They owe us. With coalition forces, we can bolster our numbers and make this look like it isn't just a Ylissean invasion of a foreign country."

"Not a bad idea." Robin considered. "It doesn't get us anywhere close to 10,000; no one's going to put up those kinds of numbers to fight a Ylissean war if Ylisse is only commiting 500. They'll match even at best. But its not a bad idea…"

"We need to show that we're serious; that's the whole point of surging that many troops to begin with, right? Whats more serious than bringing an international commitment to the table." Chrom countered. "We don't ***need*** 10,000 soldiers if we have Chon'sin and Regna Ferox."

"It could work." Robin approved. "Assuming of course that we can actually bring Chon'sin and Regna Ferox on board. Can it be done?"

"Regna Ferox for sure. Ambassador Lon'qu has disclosed…certain information…that leads me to believe the Khans will jump at the opportunity to flex Feroxi muscle. Chon'sin is going to require some deft diplomacy."

"We have no leverage against Chon'sin. They own our debt." *Smooth move, jackass.*

"Indeed they do. And we will remind them that they have an interest in seeing that debt repaid, when the costs of the Magvel campaign going sour come up for discussion."

"A bold move. Perhaps too bold." Robin cautioned.

"You love my bold moves." Chrom charmed.

"If you can pull that off, I will be genuinely amazed." Robin had her doubts. But it wasn't the worst plan Chrom had ever come up with. "Regardless; you need to sign this incident report."

"…Yes, yes…of course…" Chrom affixed his signature. "Anything else you need before you go back to Magvel?"

"Ohhhhhh…I'm not going back to Magvel." Robin rose from the king's couch with a final puff. "Let the record show I'm high off my ass, and I still outsmarted you. See you at the debates."

"What debates?"

"Paragraph 17; subsection 3(e). You really should start reading what you sign." Robin took her leave.

"…Shit…" Chrom read what he had just agreed to. He had consented to Robin being relieved from duty, Vaike governing occupied Grado, and….

"You're going to debate Chrom?" Owain had a bad feeling about this.

"I'll win for sure after voters see us hash it out. Think about it," Robin made her case. "I know public policy like the back of my hand. He doesn't. I have a masterful command of every argument. I can talk circles around him. If it's just me and Chrom on a debate stage going at it, everyone watching will see that I'm the stronger candidate. He can't hide behind dirty tricks; either he knows what he's talking about, or he doesn't. It's the perfect setting."

"No." Owain set her straight. "Debates aren't about who knows more. Debates are about who comes across as more likeable. Chrom is going to destroy you."

"Come on Owain; voters are dumb. They're not *THAT* dumb."

"Wanna bet?"

"You're a charming little bastard. If you're that worried about it, you can role-play Chrom and coach me."

"No amount of coaching is going to let you out-charm Chrom."

"Try me."

"You're going to debate Robin?" Laurent had a bad feeling about this.

"I'll win for sure after voters see us hash it out. Think about it," Chrom made his case. "I'm a silver-tongued devil. She talks down to everybody. I have a masterful command of princely charm. I can talk circles around her. If it's just me and Robin on a debate stage going at it, everyone watching will see that I'm the stronger candidate. She can't hide behind dirty tricks; either she's likeable, or she isn't. It's the perfect setting."

"No." Laurent set him straight. "Debates aren't about who comes across as more likeable. Debates are about who knows more. Robin is going to destroy you."

"Come on Laurent; voters are smart. They're not *THAT* smart."

"Wanna bet?"

"You're a clever little bastard. If you're that worried about it, you can role-play Robin and coach me."

"No amount of coaching is going to let you outsmart Robin."

"Try me."

"Why aren't the builders repairing the road to Serafew?" Tharja demanded.

"Governor Vaike nulled the order." A peasant of Gardo reported. "He hath decreed that the repair work shall be performed by private contractors. There will be no public works."

"…Is that so…" Tharja prepared the brown potion. "And where at this moment is governor Vaike?"

She found him in Vigarde's Keep.

"What are you wearing?" Tharja saw he was not in his usual shirtless get-up. He was dressed from head-to-toe in a glowing black bodysuit.

"Dread Fighter Armor. Pretty cool, eh?"Vaike flexed his pecs. "Ol Teach is important now! Can't be gettin' turned to stone by no gorgons. Magic protection doesn't come any stronger than this; ain't no one landing a spell on me now!" Vaike's attention turned elsewhere. "HEY; WHAT DID I SAY! NONE OF THAT SACRED STONE NONSENSE; WE PRAISE NAGA IN THIS CASTLE!"

"…Shit…" Tharja's job just became that much harder.

READER PARTICIPATION TIME!

We've got a debate coming up. Got a question for the candidates? Ask away. Chrom and Robin will answer.

Everything is fair game. Everything.

Chapter 15: Chapter 15

This was not an easy chapter to write. I asked for questions and you guys stepped up. Good job. There was one specific request to see a candidate 'ROASTED' on one specific issue. And I followed the prompt. With that…

Robin For Exalt

"**The facts show that people who are raped — who are truly raped —don't get pregnant."-**Henry Aldridge; Republican Legislator from North Carolina-

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"The opening questions for tonight's debate have been selected by voters. They are the issues that Ylisse is talking about. Candidates will answer faithfully and succinctly, with a right of rebuttal to all opposing answers." Tiki set the stage (after much wrangling and posturing and accusations of bias, Chrom and Robin had finally settled on Tiki as a suitable moderator). "This will be a watershed moment in the history of Ylisse. I trust that all parties involved will conduct themselves with decorum befitting the dignity of the occasion."

"How long until this turns into a shouting match?" Kjelle whispered in the audience.

"However long it takes to ask a question about their love-life." Nah whispered back.

"FIRST QUESTION: I have to start with the obvious one. Why Isn't Vaike here?" Tiki asked.

"Vaike…" Robin paused, trying to think of something gracious. *Thinks BWAHAHAHA! Is an argument. Doesn't know the difference between a fact and an opinion. Would bukakke the whole debate with stupid if we gave him a podium.*

"Vaike cannot be here tonight, because he is honorably serving in Magvel. We thank all the brave men and women in uniform who cannot be here tonight. Their sacrifice is the reason we as a free people can come together to have this debate. Let us take a moment of silence to honor those great Ylisseans overseas, and all who serve." Chrom brought his A-Game from the start.

Right then-and-there, Robin knew she was in for a rough night.

"This next question comes from Caelleh. Allegations have been swirling that the Ylisstol Emblemiers cheated to get to the stickball championship. Have the candidates taken a position on this controversy?"

What kind of a fucking question is that. Ask me about public policy…is what Robin wanted to say. But she was facing Chrom, who was most certainly going to go full sports-talk . It wouldn't due to look as though she was too high-and-mighty to talk stickball with the common plebs. Owain had prepped her for just this kind of question. "First of all…I just wanna say…I was rooting for the Southtown Thunders. I really thought this was gonna be their year." Robin lightened the mood with a wise-crack and even got a few chuckles. The Thunders were the worst team in the league. "In all seriousness though; its always unfortunate when the integrity of a cherished Ylissean institution comes under fire. It may not be the biggest thing we've got going on right now. But our children look up to our athletes as role-models. They shouldn't be learning its okay to cheat. I hope the league is taking these accusations very seriously."

"Emblemiers; all day, every day, until the end of days. These colors don't run." Chrom got a nice whoop out of that one. "I honestly don't think it made a difference one way or another. Ylisstol had an amazing season. Their field game was so tight; I can't think of a single game where regulation bats would have been a make-or-break. Obviously integrity matters, and if there's real substance to this *scandal* I trust the league will handle it. Come on Tiki; give us a hard one."

"…Concerning Severagate…" Tiki immediately made Crom eat his words. "The public heard two very different versions of events. Severa hasn't been seen in public since the scandal broke, and the conflict of accounts was never resolved. Is it still the position of each candidate that the other is lying, and why hasn't Severa issued a public statement?"

Chrom and Robin shot each other the ***are you going to take this or should I*** look (they had privately agreed beforehand that if a Severa question came up, they were going to side-step it). Robin didn't need investigators poking around into how she had knowingly lied about Owain's extramarital relations with Severa, and Chrom didn't need investigators poking around into how Sumia had started the fib that Severa was pregnant to entrap Robin.

"What happened with Severa was a deeply personal matter, and I wholeheartedly regret that it became a public spectacle." Robin stayed on image control. "There was much confusion and misreporting of facts in the rush of the initial…incident. I do not believe my opponent ***lied***, so much as he received faulty information and ran with it before better information became available."

"You called Severa—and these were your exact words—a ***petulant, ill-tempered whore.*"** Tiki quoted Robin. "Was that based on *better information*?"

"I think we can all agree; the matter could have been handled better. There was a rush to judgment on both sides." Chrom butted in. "As to what really happened; suffice it to say we now know neither of the stories in circulation were entirely….*errrrr*…accurate. Let's not forget who the real victim is here. Severa has communicated in no uncertain terms that she does not want her private life to be a public issue, and out of respect for her wishes I'm not going to discuss it further."

"Severa not being seen in public since supposedly becoming pregnant has raised speculation that she isn't pregnant at all, and that rumors to the contrary were started by your campaign. How do you respond to these allegations?"

Thats exactly how it happened. "This is a private matter. It's being privately resolved. Severa has requested that we keep it that way, and I respect her wishes. That's all I have to say about it." Chrom stonewalled. "Next question."

"…Its not much of a debate so far…" Cynthia whispered to Lucina. "They're just agreeing with each other."

"They haven't asked a policy question yet." Lucina astutely noted. "…Wait for it…"

"This next question is on the War in Magvel ." Tiki flipped to the next cue card.

"…there it is…"

"Chrom; the decision to intervene in the Renaisian Conflict after two wars has been heavily criticized. Dudeaga speaks for many Ylisseans when he asks: what were you thinking, getting involved in another war when Ylisse hasn't even recovered from the last two?"

"An excellent question! To Dudeaga and Ylisseans of like mind, I say…" Chrom repeated the speech on Ylissean exceptionalism and the obligation to use the world's strongest army as a global force for good that he had given to Lucina.

"I am not opposed to using the Ylissean Guard as a ***global force for good***. I agree; it would be inconsistent with our values to ignore the plight of the powerless and the oppressed. But it is not a power that can be wielded recklessly. Magvel was the wrong war, in the wrong place, at the wrong time." Robin countered. "We went in on bad intelligence. We've gotten bogged down in sectarian violence and local feuds where, no matter what side we take, we're going to be generating ill-will against Ylisse. We're coming across as an occupying power, not as peacekeepers. All the while the Laguz of Grann are being massacred in a Begnion response to slave revolts, and in a theater where Ylissean intervention would actually serve as a shining example of everything this great nation stands for we are now powerless to act because King Chrom made ***intervention*** a dirty word by invading the wrong country."

"Robin is grossly misrepresenting my position and refusing to acknowledge her own culpability for mistakes in Magvel." Chrom turned to Robin. "I did not order intervention in Magvel. I ordered an assessment of whether or not intervention was necessary. Your job was to collect intelligence, was it not?"

"If you mean to insinuate that I did not do my job, you didn't send me so much a single pegasus for scouting." Robin jabbed.

"And if you mean to insinuate you couldn't perform for lack of supplies, you were operational enough to kill Emperor Vigarde. Which is WHY we are now *bogged down in sectarian violence*. If there was an intelligence failure leading to an unnecessary war in Magvel, it was because you went rouge and botched your assignment."

"My opponent's attempts to shift the blame for this debacle cannot overcome the reality that if he had listened to me, we never would have gone into Magvel in the first place. Magvel is his war." Robin had never known Chrom to be a man lacking in testicular fortitude, but even she had to marvel at the enormity of the balls it took to start a war she had opposed and then blame her for it. "I was against going in from day one. I advised Chrom that once we went in, we could not control with any degree of certainty whether we wound up in an exploratory or combat role. I further advised of the risks of being drawn into a regional conflict. Chrom was unresponsive then, as he is unresponsive now. And truthfully, we all know the REAL reason he wanted to go to war was so that he could send me overseas and sit his throne without contest."

"Lies and slander." Chrom denied it. "My opponent's attempts to shift the blame for this debacle cannot overcome the reality that had she not blundered into a dead emperor and an occupation, Ylissean intervention in Magvel would have

been a proper display of our commitment to peace and justice."

"…Concerning use of the Ylissean military…" Tiki stuck with the theme. "Nemid wants to know how prepared Ylisse is for an invasion by a foreign country. AdConsequentiam wants to know how you feel about spying on Ylissean citizens in the name of national security. And Tifer wants to know what you're going to do about the barbarian problem."

"Ylisse is fully prepared to handle any foreign threat that comes our way." Chrom assured. "In the run-up to slaying Grima, The Shepherds developed a number of new forging techniques and enhancement spells. The results are now standard gear for all Ylissean soldiers. No one wants any of that. With the spying on Ylisseans…the right to privacy is something we take very seriously, and not something we're looking to take away. But the Grimleal are still out there. They hide among us, and we need to be able to find out who they are and what they're planning. That means our sages do need to monitor magical communications. Just at a level where they can fish for buzzwords and hone it on suspicious chatter. We're not looking at what charms you bought from your local bog witch or what conjurer's baubles you're bringing to the bedroom; not unless you're talking about running off to the Dragon's Table with a human sacrifice. Law-abiding Ylisseans have nothing to fear from this program, and its already prevented a number of Grimleal attacks. With the barbarian problem…one thing we need to do is improve border security, which my opponent is against. Stopping barbarians starts with stopping them from moving freely between Ylisse and Plegia. I am currently working with the hierarchs to develop a comprehensive solution…and I think that's everything…"

"First of all, I am NOT against border security. I'm against making it difficult for people who don't have ill motives to come here lawfully." Robin responded. "But that's an entirely separate issue. We have to address the act that barbarians aren't just crossing in from Plegia; they're homegrown in Ylisse. And they're always going to be home grown in Ylisse, until we deal with the issues that make people turn to a life of barbarism. That's why as Exalt, my top priorities will be expanding access to education and bringing upward mobility to the working class. Ylisse should be a country where anyone can get rich; not just crime lords and the sons of great houses."

The first part got grumbles. The last part got a fair amount of applause.

"Second, with respect to our new forging techniques and enhancement spells, what my opponent didn't tell you is how absurdly expensive they are. Brave reforging is the single most expensive item in the Ylissean budget. We spend more on super-weapons then housing, transportation, education, and agriculture ***combined***. And we barely have enough for any of that other stuff. We could spend HALF of what we spend on weapons, and still have the strongest army in the world. Our problem isn't that we're under-prepared for an invasion. Our problem is we've got military spending eating up so much of the budget that King Chrom needed to sell the queen's jewels to fix the sewers. I don't have much to say about spying on Ylisseans. Yes...I'm for it. The Grimleal threat is real. No…I don't think there are enough protections to stop it from being abused. If we're going to give the Exalt that kind of power, it needs to be used openly and with public oversight. Not in secret meetings with the hierarchs."

"Moving on to the economy." Qwq Qweqq and Dustedwithstars want to know how you plan on growing the Ylissean economy. Qwq Qweqq specifically wants to know if you think we need to diversify to become more resistant to shocks."

"Chrom?" Robin gave him the first bite at the apple.

"You don't wanna take this?"

Nice try dumb-dumb; you're not piggy backing off of my answer for this one. "I really think *The King* should go first."

"…You're too kind…" Chrom said in a tone that made the words sound more like *well fuck you too.* "First of all, before we can talk solutions I think we need to have an honest talk about what the problem is. There's a whole lot of talk about how we got into this crisis…"

"…we got into this crisis because you lowered taxes while fighting two wars." Robin filled in the blank.

"You sure you don't want to go first?" Chrom got a chuckle out of the verbal jab, and Robin backed off. "Right; so the bottom line is we need to get our economy moving again and pay down the debt. That means putting more people back to work and paying taxes. My first priority as your leader is **jobs, jobs, jobs.**" Chrom said the word that politicians say when they have nothing else to say. "Magvel is now open to trade and needs brick and grain. That's Ylissean jobs. We're diversifying into new markets by opening post-war relations with Plegia and Vam; forging ties that bind us in shared prosperity. We're also removing obstacles to entering the workforce and creating new opportunities to start a business here at home. Some of you might have heard…weed is legal now…"

For this Chrom got resounding applause.

"This year alone, the Hemp Industry is going to create 20,000 Ylissean jobs. People we were locking up at public

expense are going to work and pay taxes. Theres going to be more money for schools and public works, and we're not going to have to take a hatchet to the Ylissean Guard to get it! Ylisse succeeds when Ylisseans succeed, and Ylisseans succeed when we don't haul them into court for providing a service that people want, demand, and desire!"

For this Chrom got a standing ovation.

"…Again…my opponent is not telling you the full story…" Robin tried to get the crowd back on her side. "Chrom's legalization bill gave Ylissean millionaires a huge tax cut and made up the difference with a cannabis sales tax. That's a tax that's going to be paid almost entirely by the poor and the working class. Chrom says hes growing the economy; whos he growing it for? Chrom's *growing economy* is an economy where you work as hard as you've always worked, pay more, keep less, and the richest of the rich reap the windfalls of growth."

For this Robin got some mild applause.

"Here's my plan for Ylisse: cut military spending and raise taxes on the nobles. Invest in infrastructure and education. Pass a living wage law, make it illegal for any Ylissean to be paid less for the value of their full-time labor than the cost of basic necessities for living, and diversify the economy from the bottom-up. Think of it; real spending-power for real people. Bakers buying silks. Potters buying pearls. That's REAL diversification. More Ylisseans enjoy Ylissean wealth; not wars to grow the wealth of privileged Ylisseans.

For this Robin got resounding applause. (and for this a clique of Vaike supporters shouting "COMMIE!")

"You know Robin….its really easy for you to stand there and talk about how horrible it is that I used tax cuts to move my legalization bill when you're not the one who has to deal with the Hierarchs." Chrom wasn't going to let that momentum keep building. "Do I care about inequality and creating opportunity? Of course I do. I passed the Prohibition Repeal Act because I care so much; it made life BETTER for people who couldn't get jobs and were being locked up because our laws said they were dangerous criminals. You wouldn't have passed it with the taxation clause? Guess what...our drug laws would still be locking people up and killing jobs. I passed the Affordable Healer Act because I care so much; it made life BETTER for people who couldn't afford healers. You wouldn't have passed it with the insurance mandate? Guess what…our health laws would still be leaving millions of Ylisseans without healers. Did I want the tax cuts for millionaires and huge perks for private insurance? **NO!** But guess what…I'm not a **CONQUEROR**! I'm an **EXALT**! That means I can't just do whatever I want and say "***you don't like it…screw you…***" to lawmakers. If you don't understand that and you think you can just boss people into doing whatever-the-hell-you-want with no blowback, you will **NEVER** be an effective Exalt. Finding common ground in the heat of confrontation is the **ONLY** way you can make our government work!" *Its also the only way you can make a relationship work; maybe if you understood that, you'd be queen right now.* "Robin's my-way-or-the-highway attitude is just the kind of thing that makes our government fail!"

With this Chrom got the crowd back on his side and grabbed another standing ovation.

"That's…the thing about that is…" *He thinks I don't know that when he says **our government*** he really means ***our old romance***? *I'll kill him. I'll fucking kill him.* "What Chrom doesn't seem to understand is…" Robin stumbled her way through a sloppy, uninspiring answer. Chrom had her rattled.

"…Immigration…" Tiki moved on to the issue Robin was most dreading. "MediumRare wants to know what bothers you most about your opponent's stance on the issue. Dudeaga wants to know what you plan to do about the inequality between Ylissean citizens and migrants of non-Ylissean descent."

"This one, I *know* Robin is just dying to answer first." Chrom paid her back in kind for the last round. "We of course have much to learn from her unique…insights…into the *immigrant* experience." Chrom not-so-subtly reminded everyone that she was Plegian.

"…You're too kind…" Robin said in a tone that made the words sound more like *well fuck you harder. "*Well…I can say just as a matter of general principle that the economic plan I've outlined will reduce inequality as a whole while making Ylisse more prosperous. Migrants in particular aren't a target of my plan, but they're going to benefit from it as much as anyone else. A rising tide lifts all ships. I can't say too much about Chrom's policy on immigration, because I honestly have no idea what it is. One day he's hiring Plegians to clean his castle. The next he's out in the farmlands talking about how we need to protect Ylissean jobs from immigrant labor. Love it or hate it; with my position, you know exactly where I'm coming from. I believe immigration is good for Ylisse and I make no apologies about it. My biggest problem with Chrom's policy, I would say, is that our dear Exalt is trying to play both sides of the fence. He has no principled stance."

Did this forked-tongued devil woman just pull the integrity card on me? "My position on the immigration issue is clear." *I don't have a position. I need a position. Fuck…what's my position? Something more popular then Robin and less crazy then Vaike; hmmmmmm.* "Immigration…is good for Ylisse. LEGAL immigration. Illegal Immigration is a problem. We need to know who is coming here and why. Any Slaver or Grimleal can cross on over with honest, hardworking folk

looking to make a better life for themselves in this Greatest-Country-On-God's-Green-Earth if we aren't controlling our borders. So yes…I endorse Robin's position that immigrants grow our economy and that we don't need mass deportations. And yes...I endorse Vaike's position that we need a border fence and better enforcement of our immigration laws. That's not me playing both sides of the issue. That is my sincerely held belief that we don't need all-or-nothing extremism to govern on controversial issues. Which is what bothers me most about Robin, and not just on the immigration issue. We can find common ground and govern from the center. This issue is a perfect example of how." *BOOM. Nailed it.*

"Damnnnnn. Chrom is kicking ASS up there." Owain passed *Gandalf the Grey* and the Big-Bubba-Budz back to Laurent. "He actually sounds like he knows what he's talking about. You prepped him like a champ."

"To your credit, you did an amazing job with Robin." Laurent listened attentively as Tiki asked a string of surprisingly intimate questions from Studious Thug and Chasticot, running the gauntlet from Robin's reputation as "a woman of easy virtue" to Chrom and Sumia's sex life to Robin's suspect marriage and romantic history with the King. "This is the part where she would normally be screaming like a madwoman. She sounds…amiable…"

"This next question is on reproductive choice." Tiki read.

"Uh-Oh." Laurent knew this was going to end poorly.

"Uh-Oh?" Owain didn't see the problem.

"I was not aware that this was going to be an issue in controversy."

"…You mean…"

"I didn't prep him for this one."

"Acqua Sole wants to know where the candidates stand on the issues of abortion and birth control."

"Abortion?" Chrom blinked.

"It's when you purposefully end a pregnancy because you don't want to have a child." Robin threw him a lifeline.

"Oh…that's...a thing that people do?" *Why is that any of my business?* Chrom got the sense that he had to tread very carefully with this one. "I would never. I think that's horrible. I don't think it should be illegal per-se, but it should definitely be heavily, heavily regulated. Like…if you want to do it early in the pregnancy…fine…but there should be some cut-off date where it's considered murder."

"What about rape?" Robin challenged.

"What does that have to with anything?" *Where is she going with this?*

"If a woman is raped and captive and can't get an abortion until late in the pregnancy, should she have to have her rapist's baby just because the law sets an arbitrary cut-off date?"

"That would never happen. Women can't get pregnant from being raped." *Why did the room just get really quiet?*

"Women can't get pregnant from being raped?" Robin repeated just to make sure she had heard correctly.

"I mean...I guess you could have sex while you're too drunk to know what's going on and get pregnant and be like ***I really didn't want to do that*** after the fact. Then say that someone raped you to save face. But in cases of ***legitimate rape***, the female body has ways of shutting that whole thing down." *That's a boooo. Thats a louder boooo. Why am I being boooo-ed?*

"…I…" Robin was dumbfounded. *Prime Tactic Number One: when your opponent is digging himself into a hole, give him a bigger shovel.* "I'm pro-choice across the board and I have no further response to Acqua Sole; I yield the remainder of my response time to my opponent. Because I really want to hear what he thinks a ***legitimate rape*** is."

The next question was on Gangrel's endorsement of Robin. And absolutely no one cared. Least of all Robin.

"…I'm sorry…can we go back to talking about my opponent's position on rape?"

A/N: Will Chrom survive his Todd Akin moment? Todd Akin did not survive his Todd Akin moment. Chrom is not Todd Akin.

Speaking of unplanned pregnancies...I said Morgan would not be making an appearance in this story. I lied.

Chapter 16: Chapter 16

Chapter 15 was a big hit. Couldn't have written that one on my own; you guys rock. Special thanks to RubyGloom (who continues to leave reviews that can pass for chapters in their own right) and to If You Give a Duck Chocolate (who recommended the fic "Harry Potter Becomes a Communist"). And now this is happening…

Robin for Exalt

"Not every ejaculation deserves a name." -George Carlin-

"CAN WE GET ONE HIT ON ROBIN WITHOUT FREDERICK KILLING SOMEONE OR CHROM GAFFING!?" No one was unhappier with how the debate ended than Sumia.

It had been the queen's idea to 'leak' the Gangrel endorsement and have the rumor of it come up as a voter question, giving Chrom his for-the-win knockout without the divisiveness of outright calling Robin a Plegian saboteur. She excused herself from the debate hall around the time the questions started probing into her marital business—lest she say something so outrageous as to completely ruin the excellent night Chrom was having—thinking that for all the indignity, it was at least going to be the deathblow to Robin's attempted power-grab.

After-the-fact, she heard about the next round of questions and Chrom's foot-in-mouth moment from Lucina.

"Okay…in my defense…that abortion question came out of nowhere…" Chrom still didn't understand why this was an issue in controversy. *There's born children starving to death and being sold into slavery, and no one's chanting every-life-matters for them. How is ending pregnancies the thing that riles everybody up?*

"Your abortion answer was fine…it was the ***women can't get pregnant from rape*** part…" Lissa told him.

"***Legitimate*** Rape." Chrom corrected. "The kind where the juices aren't flowing 'cause there's forced entry; women can't conceive if…"

"Stop. Who told you that that?" Lucina had to wonder. It was one thing to not know something. It was another thing altogether to 'know' something that was completely wrong. That meant someone at some point had misinformed him.

"I heard it from…" Chrom realized his error. ***"OH GOD DAMN IT!"***

"From who?" Sumia prompted.

"He's remembering that he heard it from our father. And hes remembering that everything father taught us about murder and rape should be ignored, because father was psychotic." Lissa filled her in. "…probably would have been a good thing to remember before the debate…"

"So wait…women CAN get pregnant from being raped?"

"**Yes!"** Sumia, Lissa, and Lucina shouted at him.

"…Really?"

"**YES!"**

"LAURENT!" Chrom called for his grandmaster.

"Here, your grace."

"Can women get pregnant from being raped?"

"Indisputably. And furthermore…" Laurent explained in scholarly detail why the ***legitimate*** distinction didn't matter.

"Well alrighty then; way to let me make an ass out of myself." Chrom reprimanded. "Why wasn't I prepped for on abortion question?"

"Prep time was allocated by priority of need; you were better served studying foreign affairs and fiscal policy." Laurent counseled. "In a liberalized democracy with a secular-progressive ethic, the answer you just gave would have been a political death sentence. Luckily for you, this is Ylisse. A country that is still mostly…errrrr…country…"

"You think farmlanders don't know how wrong that is?" Lissa had grown to appreciate that country folk weren't quite so empty-headed as the Laurent's and Maribelle's of the world seemed to think they were.

"I think farmlanders generally don't care." Laurent clarified. "And I think those who do are of such progressive leanings that they were most likely supporting Robin to begin with."

"…"

"Lucina?" It looked to Laurent as though the princess had something to say.

"Nothing. Just…thinking how sad it is that we live in a country where THAT'S what passes for ***progressive***." Lucina's faith in Ylisse was failing.

"Bottom line. I'll survive." Credit where credit was due to Chrom; the man was unflappable in a crisis. "I'll issue an apology and a correction first thing in the morning. This isn't even close to deepest hole we've had to dig out of. Frederick killed a dude."

"…You wasted the Gangrel Endorsement…" Sumia was still cross.

"We'll revisit it." Chrom decided. "It's floating out there now; it won't be quite so bombish when we make the charge ourselves, but we can still do some damage."

"It was *SUPPOSED* to be bombish." Sumia reminded him. "What about Tharja? She's always with Robin. There has to be something there we can hit her with."

"…Sure…" Chrom had no intention of making an issue out of Robin's association with Tharja. He really didn't feel like losing his election bid in an unfortunate hexing accident. But Sumia didn't need to know that. "Laurent; start drafting my apology. Something humbling, but not too ketchy."

"Introspective or conciliatory?"

"Introspective; make it sound like I've learned a lesson." Chrom had in fact learned a lesson.

"About how vaginas work?" Lissa poked fun at him.

"About the importance of reliable sourcing." *That should play well with the intelligentsia*. Chrom helped himself to a mojito; the evening's drama looked to be coming to a close. "Aborting a baby…really though…why would anyone do that. How much trouble can an unplanned pregnancy possibly be?"

"Milord!" Frederick announced. "There's a boy outside claiming to be your son."

"…I don't have a son…"

"He has the brand of the exalt. And furthermore…" Fredrick introduced what was unmistakably a boyish version of Robin with Chrom's hair.

Fuck My Life.

"To the king!" Kjelle—guest of honor at Team Robin—toasted in jest and drank celebratory champagne.

"Long may he reign." Robin lifted her glass and toasted back, but did not drink. *Can't do that for 9 months...urghhhhh.* "Not the way I wanted to bring him down, but I'll take it. A win's a win."

"I've…considered your offer. And I've made up my mind. " Undecided voter Kjelle was no longer undecided. Not after Chrom's abortion meltdown.

"You'll do it then?"

"You get us a new field, and I'll get you an endorsement from the Ylisstol Emblemiers."

"I pledge to you that when I am Exalt, Ylisstol will have a stadium that puts Arena Ferox to shame." *Chrom thinks he can stay in power by buying friends with favors? I'm gonna beat him at his own game. Oh, I can't wait to see the look on his face when he finds out I'm being endorsed by his favorite sports team.* "On my honor."

" I can ask for nothing more. It is so sworn!" Kjelle shook on it. Bless her heart; the girl had no eye for deception.

They feasted and fought, and spoke of other times they had feasted and fought. And as the evening drew to a close, Robin was convinced she had found a valuable new ally.

This was fun. I had fun tonight. Joyously Robin poured a little something to congratulate herself, then remembered that she couldn't, then instead prepared a horrid soy milk concoction and downed it with an unpleasant gag. Then there was no joy. She felt cranky and crampy and ready to cry.

This was going to be a long nine months.

"OWAIN; my feet hurt!" *A woman in my condition shouldn't have to stand three hours at a podium.* "Be a dear and carry me to bed."

No answer.

"…Owain?" That was longer than it usually took to be attended by her husband-in-name-only and full time man-servant.

Still no answer.

She found him outback with Inigo; heavily intoxicated—both of them—on god only knew what, and in the middle of what looked to be a profound moment of male bonding . He looked skiddish at the sight of her.

"Tell her bro." Inigo helped him find his courage.

"Tell me what?"

"…I…"Owain stalled out, and Inigo gave him a friendly punch in the side. "…I've decided. I need to do right by my kid. I'm gonna try to patch things up with Severa and be there when the baby comes."

Robin burst out laughing.

"This isn't funny!" Owain shouted. "I've been agonizing for weeks over this; its the hardest choice I've ever had to make!"

Robin laughed harder.

"I'M SERIOUS!"

"You're dumb. Severa isn't pregnant."

"WHAT!?"

"Sumia made the whole thing up. Severa was in on it. I agreed not to expose her if Chrom agreed not to expose you. Inigo; if you have a brain in your head, you won't repeat a word you've just heard."

Owain started bawling.

"…Gods…you're moodier than I am…" Robin sighed, saw Inigo off with some gold to buy his silence, and attended to her hot mess of a husband.

"…I was ready… " Owain cried. "I really wanted to be a dad."

This time Robin only chuckled.

"WHY ARE YOU LAUGHING AT ME!?"

"Dummy. You ARE going to be a dad."

"But you said Severa wasn't…" and then he realized what she meant. "…No way…"

"...I've always liked the name *Morgan*..."

"…"

"I swear on Emerynn's grave I didn't cheat!"

"…"

"The boy's obviously a time traveler. I mean….look at him. I would have had to have gotten Robin pregnant when I was nine.

"…"

"Laurent says he isn't even from the same timeline as the other children. Alternate universes, or some shit. So technically…I did't cheat in the future either?"

"…"

"Please say something."

"I want a divorce."

"…You're mad at me for something I didn't even do yet…"

"WHAT THE HELL DO YOU WANT ME TO SAY! YOU'RE STILL OBSESSED WITH ROBIN, SHE PRACTICALLY LIVES WITH US, AND NOW YOU HAVE A KID!?"

"In another universe."

"HE'S HERE NOW!"

"And I'm as confused about it as you are."

"LIAR! EVERY TIME; WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE A TIME-CHILD APPEARED EVERY TIME!" There was a pattern, Sumia knew. Laurent hadn't shown up until the first time Miriel sexed Ricken. Owain hadn't shown up until the first time Donnel sexed Lissa. Nah hadn't shown up until Vaike had inspired a weird and deeply confusing *is it or is it not pedophilia?* debate amongst his fellow Shepherds.

"I told you; I'm not sleeping with Robin! And that doesn't even make SENSE!" Chrom didn't know a damn thing about time travel, but he knew quite a bit about first times. "If that's what did it, he would have showed up after our first march on the Northroad."

"If he was lost and out of time, that wouldn't matter. But the distinct and singular nature of his jump leads me to believe he arrived in present time by a distinct and singular trigger." Laurent theorized. "How he arrived in our universe instead of his own, I cannot say. But it is reasonable to conclude that Chrom need not have engaged in recent intercourse with Robin as a condition precedent to the arrival."

"But why *NOW*?" Sumia, unplacated, demanded of the grandmaster.

"I can only speculate as to mechanisms of causation. But If I had to take a wild guess…Robin's pregnant…"

Lissa shuffled uncomfortably.

"Something you wanna tell us?" Chrom picked up on his sister's jitters.

"…I…heard it from Owain while Laurent was running tests." Lissa broke the news.

"...Oh no…" Chrom could already feel the headaches. *Hormonal Robin is coming. God help us all.*

"I'm going to be a graaandmaaaaa!" Lissa squealed.

"…Maybe…" Sumia's womanly intuition peaked; this all sounded VERY familiar. It occurred to her; this could all be Robin's twisted way of getting back at her for Severagate. "Chrom. Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" *She tricked Valm into burning its own fleet. She's capable of this much.*

"Not unless you're thinking **am I really as pro-life as I think I am**?" Chrom was giving his—son—the if-looks-could-kill stare. *How do I make this go away?*

"…"

"…"

"…"

"…"

"So am I prince?" Morgan asked hopefully, cheerful and oblivious.

Cheeky bastard. "No. You're the load your mom should have swallowed."

Chapter 17: Chapter 17

Not getting any hatemail over Ferguson or Abortion has made me feel comfortable enough with where my readership base is at that I can now, with only mild hesitation, write this chapter.

Robin for Exalt

"**Diplomacy is the art of telling people to go to hell in such a way that they ask for directions."** -Winston Churchill-

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Between apologizing for gaffs and suppressing scandals and attempting to mend a failing marriage, King Chrom still had to govern. No governing task was as tedious as hearing petitioners to the throne.

"The King will hear your grievances!" Laurent announced the commencement of the day's session. **"The Feroxi Ambassador has the floor!"**

"Permission to speak freely, sir." Lon'qu approached the throne.

"Granted." Chrom briefly forgot what counted as *speech* under the Feroxi Way.

SMACK! Lon'qu punched the king square in the jaw.

"What was that for!?"

"You know exactly what that was for."

"Daddy!" a very un-pregnant Severa ran to Lon'qu and gave him a big hug. Cordelia too approached unsolicited, and handed Chrom a document under seal.

"…my letter of resignation…" she said without preamble or further elaboration. And when Lon'qu departed for Regna Ferox after arranging a meeting with the Khans, mother and daughter departed with him.

"Hierarch Haggerty has the floor!" Laurent summoned the next petitioner.

"…your grace…" Ylisse's head lawmaker paid due homage. "This matter comes before the throne regarding…"

SNAP!

Morgan shot hierarch Haggerty in the rear with a slingshot and ran off snickering.

"…Who's that boy?" The blend of Plegian features and Ylissean royal blood was not lost upon the hierarch.

"A newly discovered bastard of the late Mikolos VII." Chrom at last had a use for his father's sordid, sordid reputation.

"By-and-through?"

"His mother was a Plegian whore." Chrom half-lied.

"So this Plegian son of exalted blood is your…"

"Half-brother."

"…you don't say…"

"…"

"…"

"Your petition, Lord Counselor?"

"…Yes…of course…my petition…" Haggerty smirked knowingly. "This matter comes before the throne concerning implementation of the Prohibition Repeal Act. Since you legalized cannabis arrests are down 30 percent, incarcerations are down 20 percent, and the mason's guild has cancelled 3 contracts for the construction of new prisons."

"Good."

"**No!** NOT GOOD! There's not enough work for knight officers and law mages; 12,000 Ylisseans are going to lose their jobs!"

"Hmphhh. If the only reason we needed that many knights and prisons to begin with was prohibition, it would seem to me Ylisse has too many knights and prison. And nothing of value is being lost."

"And what do you mean to tell the servicemen who are going to be receiving their pink-slips come month's end?"

"Thank you for your service?" Chrom offered, unhelpfully. "Hold that thought; I think I'm going to have a better answer after this next petitioner. LAURENT; send in our Lord Commander!" *I know what she wants. Lets kill two birds with one stone.*

"**Lady Robin has the floor!**"

"Chrom." Robin didn't bother with the king's formalities.

"Robin." Chrom didn't bother with hers.

"…That boy I saw on the way in…"

"My half-brother."

"...half-brother…"

"Just some bastard my father sired on one of his crusades. Pay him no mind."

"No kidding. Who's his mother?"

"Why surely you've heard—t'was a Plegian whore." Haggerty was enjoying this.

"I have heard that the strongest bond in the world is between a mother and child." Robin glared. "Were you at some point planning on…"

"The boy has no memory of his mother. Given his—circumstances—I would think you'd appreciate the propriety of keeping it that way." Chrom gave her a firm, unspoken ***NO***.

"*Propriety*. Yes. Gods forbid you do something ***improper***." Robin presented the latest update from occupied Magvel. "Would it be too much to assume that you've read the dossier?"

"I've been briefed. There's a new terrorist group making moves against us in Grado."

"*Sons of Lyon*, they're calling themselves." Robin brought him up to speed. "Their recruiting efforts have been significantly more successful than ours; we estimate as many as 50,000 foreign fighters have pledged for them. They control the capital, the Jehannan border, and the south coast. And they're systematically killing every Magvelian who pledged for Ylisse."

"…So we need a stronger troop commitment to beat them?" Chrom surmised.

"We need to WITHDRAW!" Robin told him, not for the first time. "We have no dog in this fight."

"The Sons of Lyon are religious fanatics. They publicly executed a 10 year old boy for going to a stickball game, because they believe indulging the culture of heathen nations is offensive to their god." Chrom actually had read the dossier. "I will not leave a continent to be run by Grimleal."

"Oh don't act all high-and-mighty; you created the power vacuum that let them rise to power in the first place!"

"Rightly so. Vigarde was a murderer and a tyrant. And now we fill it. You said so yourself; do it right, or don't do it at all. We inspire a generation of hatred against Ylisse if we waltz into Grado, break it, and leave."

"I also said we need 10,000 soldiers to do it right."

"Lord Counselor; how many knight officers and law mages did you say were going to be in need of new work come month's end?" Chrom asked of the hierarch.

"12,000, your grace."

"Prepare a bill designating all non-essential law enforcement personnel reserve units of the Ylissean guard. Come the

morrow, I will make a formal declaration of war against The Sons of Lyon and call in the reserves."

"Great idea. You should totally do that." Robin baited.

"This will be a highly unpopular move." Haggerty warned.

"Carrots and sticks, Lord Counselor. Throw in whatever sweeteners you need to make it palatable. I understand there's a controversy afoot in the Lawman's Guild…something about retirement reform and public pensions…"

"…So there is…" Haggerty saw his angle. "How very clever of our Exalt."

"Right then…we're done here. Send in the next petitioner."

"Can we talk later about your—half-bother. I…"

"***We're done here.***"Chrom dismissed. He could not believe how indiscreet Robin was being in open court. It must have been the hormones. "Next Petitioner!"

"The Begnion Minister of Racial Purity has the floor!"

That's a nefarious sounding title. Chrom thought, as he was addressed by a nefarious looking man.

"Esteemed gentleman of Ylisse; I have come to warn you of the single greatest threat facing human civilization." the minister spoke. "The subhuman beastmen are monsters. Vile, cunning monsters. They breed with our women, corrupt our bloodlines, and subvert our governments. They debase our culture and create moral anarchy, so that they may take their place as the natural rulers of a people succumbed to depravity and perversion. And among their elite there exists a most heinous and diabolical scheme—***Lionism***—to take over the world and enslave humanity to the whims of beasts. We have learned it!"

Laurent approached the throne and whispered sage counsel to the Exalt.

"My grandmaster informs me that Lionism is simply the belief that the Beast Laguz—what we call ***Taguel***—should have a national homeland in the lands that were once ancient Gallia. My grandmaster further informs me that throughout history taguel have been scapegoated for societal ills and vigorously persecuted in the lands to which they have been scattered since Gallia's fall, and that in the past decade alone more than six million Begnionese Taguel have been genocided in ghettos and death camps."

"We take the Lionist threat very seriously in Begnion." The minister did not deny it. "This Final Solution is the only suitable response; the biological basis of the subhumans must be eradicated if the world is ever to be free from their poison. We ask only for your cooperation in deportation and…"

"The petition is denied it the entirety. The gentleman from Begnion has 72 hours to leave Ylisse and never return. Thereafter if he is found within our borders, he will be arrested for war crimes and prosecuted to the full extent of the law." King Chrom so ordered.

"…Begnion will not forget this…" the minister threatened.

"Nor will Ylisse." Chrom threatened right back. "I will hear my next petitioner."

"Sage Lute has the floor!" Laurent announced his old classmate.

"…King Chrom…" a Magvelian girl knelt before him.

"Lute is one of our finest foreign exchange students," Laurent put in a good word for her. "She is well read, and learned in the ways of science. Listen well to what she asks of you."

"And what is it that you would ask of me?" Chrom bid her speak.

"Your help in combating what I have discovered through my research to truly be the single greatest facing human civilization."

"Hmphhh…there seems to be a lot of those now." *Every bloody petitioner thinks his pet grievance is the single greatest threat facing human civilization.* "It's not Taguel conspiracy is it?"

"This is a *REAL* threat. I'm speaking of course about the unregulated emission of arcane dust." Lute presented her findings. "Arcane dust is a byproduct of magic. It naturally exists in our atmosphere in trace amounts, but human

spellcasting has greatly increased its levels. High levels of arcane dust are associated with extreme weather phenomena: stronger storms, harsher winters, longer droughts. If we continue at our current rate we are going to render the planet unfit for human habitation."

"This is known?" Chrom was skeptical.

"This is science." Lute was sure.

Then most of Ylisse won't care. "And what do you propose I do about it?"

"Set mandatory caps on arcane dust emissions for all producers of tomes and staves. Levy an excess tax on producers who go over their limit. Invest in cleaner magics. And award a fellowship grant to the University of Ylisstol for further study.

Laurent approached the throne and whispered sage counsel to the Exalt.

"My grandmaster informs me that Bern and Etruria are the world's leading emitters of arcane dust, and that any effort to curb domestic emissions would be meaningless without an international commitment that Elibe will do the same. My grandmaster further informs me that increasing the cost of magic would be disastrous for the Ylissean economy and kill our post-war recovery."

"The first country to discover renewable magic will be the greatest economy of the next century. Ylisse could be that country…" Lute worked her angle.

"The petition is stayed, pending an inquiry into the commitments of leading emitters and the extent to which we can expect their cooperation in reducing emissions." Chrom decided. *They can say **No** instead of me.* "I will see your research forwarded to Mage-Master Pent. Next Petitioner!"

"Lady Panne has the floor!"

"…My letter of resignation…" Panne too was leaving Ylisse.

"What offense have I caused you?" this troubled Chrom.

"None. As your sister before you, you have been nothing but gracious." Panne bore the Exalt no ill will. "But this is not where my true heart lies. I must stand with my brothers and sisters raising Gallia. Their struggle is my struggle."

"…understood. You will be deeply missed, but I will not stop you."

"Thank you. For everything." Panne bowed. And then she was gone.

What the hell is happening on Tellius? "…next petitioner…"

"Priam Bin-Simba Al-Mufasa has the floor!"

A big, burly, blue-haired lion stalked into the throne room and transformed into a big, burly blue-haired man.

"…You are…" Chrom didn't know this person. He did however know battlefields, and this petitioner had the look of a man hardened by them.

"General Priam! Descendent of Sir Ike the Radiant, by-and-through the she-lion Lethe! Blood of Old Gallia! Joint Commander of the Laguz Liberation Army and the Lionist Front. You met the murderer from Begnion; you know now why I'm here..."

"I know why he's here. I don't know why you're here. Speak." Chrom would hear him tell his tale.

"Gallia is the land of the Taguel! Gallia has *ALWAYS* been the land of the Taguel! Every Taguel knows this, and yearns in his heart for the day of return!" the lion roared. "See what horrors my people have endured since we were dispersed and scattered! You know yourself what was done to them in Ylisse! Worse is being done in Begnion! When the murderers come there is no respite; the world excuses and appeases and looks away! The need for Lionism has never been clearer! The time has come for Gallia to rise once more, and for all good men to recognize the existence of the taguel state!"

Laurent approached the throne and whispered sage counsel to the Exalt.

"My grandmaster informs me that the land you would claim as the modern state of Gallia is now Crimean Gallistine. My

grandmaster further informs me that it is home to 4 million Crimeans who oppose the creation of a taguel state and do not wish to be displaced."

"Aye; even now, we are treated as criminals for returning to our homeland!" Priam presented a map with proposed borders. "Crimea is vast. We ask for only the smallest sliver of land, where the West Coast meets the Sea of Trees, to hold and defend as our own. Any beorc who accepts taguel as friend and neighbor will be welcome in our lands; it is not our purpose to displace."

"…and those who do not accept taguel as friend and neighbor? Those who mean to give you fight?"

"That is their choice to make." Priam answered grimly. "So choosing will have consequences. But it is their choice."

"Such ***choices***." Chrom knew; he had to make a BIG one. One for the history books. One that scholars were going to debate for generations to come. He regarded Priam's map; the proposed taguel state was awfully small. And surrounded by much larger, much more populace Crimean nations. "What would you ask of Ylisse?"

"Help us fight for our homeland." Priam didn't sugarcoat it. "We are outnumbered, under-equipped, and surrounded by nations that want us dead. If tomorrow we declare Gallian independence, the Crimean League will destroy us."

"I cannot fight your battles for you, oh King of Lions. But you may rest assured that Ylisse is not blind to the plight of your people or the values we share, and that when you raise your banners I will be the first to recognize the existence of Gallia."

"When we raise our banners, we're dead."

"Then take this," Chrom gifted Priam the most magnificent sword he had ever seen. It made Ragnell look like rusted iron.

"…this is…"

"Reforged Brave. The technology that has made the Ylissean Guard the strongest army in the world. Show it to your smiths; they'll know what to do."

"Your grace! This is too much!" Laurent was alarmed.

"It is the least we can do for a people so greatly wronged." Chrom had made up his mind. "We cannot fight their battle. But we can give them the means to do it themselves. They deserve that much."

"The taguel will know of this kindness." Priam bowed. "Always; you have a friend in Gallia."

"And you a friend in Ylisse." The Exalt and the Lion shook on it. "Next Petitioner!"

"Do you have any idea what you just did!?" Laurent did not call the next petitioner.

"You find opposing genocide objectionable?" Chrom saw no error.

"The secrets of Brave Reforging are the keystone of Ylissean supremacy...you just handed them out like a gift basket at a royal ball." The image problem was plain to Laurent. Had Chrom forgotten he was running a campaign? "There will be talk among the people that you are beholden to Lionists; that your interests are not Ylissean interests."

"Let them talk." Chrom was all about moderation and image, but some values could not be compromised. "Justice *IS* a Ylissean interest. I have done justice today."

"And if the Beroc-Laguzi conflict blows up before election day?"

I plainly tell the people where I stand. No apologies. And if Robin wants to play the ***who-is-for-Ylisse-and-who-is for-foreign-interests*** *game, I throw immigration in her face. "*...then we have to make some tough choices."

Chapter 18: Chapter 18

Okay. So the reaction to that thing I did last chapter was...not good. Fine. Not going down that road today. I will revisit the Beorc-Laguz allegory for the issue-that-must-not-be-touched if enough readers express an interest in seeing how I was going to play it out, never touch it again if enough readers tell me to just drop it, and put it on the back-burner for possible future use if the reviews are mixed.

Now since Chapter 17 was so heavy-handed on policy and light on lulziness Chapter 18 is...well you'll see what Chapter 18 is...

Robin for Exalt

"What kind of corrupt mind would even think of something like Gheb, let alone make a game entirely for him?"
-Fire Emblem: GhebSaga-

Fuck this country. Fuck those trees. Fuck this place in particular. Tharja Goetia-nuked an open field, a willow bosque and a shrine to some local folk-deity.

Everything about the Magvel campaign was turning ugly. The worst part was she couldn't even hex Vaike. *Stupid, Stupid Vaike.*

Libra thought to say something, thought better of it, and offered no rebuke.

"Let's play ***Bed or Battle***." Gaius invented a game to pass away the time between their forts being firebombed and their next batch of recruits being beheaded (not that they were getting much in the way of recruits lately).

"Whats that?" Stahl was bored enough to care.

"I say a Sully quote, and you have to guess if she said it in bed or in battle." Gaius set the rules of the game. "*Limp dicked whore-son; why is so hard to find a man with a good thrust?"*

"Battle." Stahl approved. This was a good game.

"*Fuck me sideways; its in so deep! God DAMN; that hurts!*"

"Battle, yes?" Gregor joined in.

"*Put some muscle into nancy-boy! I can split a bum quicker with my own arms!"*

"Bum as in poor man or bum as in lovely lady lumps?" Gregor puzzled.

"Couldn't say." Gaius wasn't giving any hints.

"Arms as in weapons or arms as in fisting?" Stahl was putting way too much thought into this.

"If I told you that it would ruin the game."

"…Tough one…" Stahl mulled it over. "Bed?"

"Trick question. Both."

KABOOM!

Olivia, Henry,and Sully ran out of a burning building: Olivia crying, Henry cackling, and Sully cursing up a storm.

Gaius, Stahl, and Gregor kept the game going, unbothered.

"WHATTAYA THINK YER DOIN'!?" Vaike attempted to rally his men. "That there recruiting center is under attack, and you're just sitting here lollygagging!"

"Pfffttt…*recruiting center*…" Gaius scoffed. "It's a giant fuck-off knight fort with no knights. Ask me how many recruits have come through since we opened it. Go on. Ask me."

"How many recruits?" Stahl played the fool.

"Lets see now…the Sons of Lyon got Vigarde's old court mage, The Moonstone General, and the Tiger's Eye," Gaius rattled off the list of high ranking personnel declaring against them, as Gheb came waddling out of the Shepard's latrines being fat and loud and obnoxious. Stench-of-Gheb followed. "We got…that guy…"

"OY! How am I suppose to wipe me arse!? This T.P. is ***RAW***!" Gheb produced Tharja's prized copy of Aversa's Night… with several pages torn out and several more crudely smudged.

"***GAHH!"***Tharja Goetia-nuked their own recruiting center. Because she could.

"Hmmmm. Teach was gonna have you run back in and kill the terrorists, but I guess that works…" Vaike scratched his head."What now…we need a new fort. OH! I KNOW! WE CAN…"

"…capture Fort Rigwald. Joy of joys." Tharja attempted to salvage her most precious tome. It was unslavagable. *That was a gift from Robin.*

"How'd ya know!? That's what I was gonna say!"

"Because we've already done it four times, ya' big stupid bastard!" Sully had never led a more pointless charge. They'd taken the Fort, declared it liberated, and moved onto the next battlefield. The Lyonans retook it the very next day (it was the worst kept secret in Magvel that the Shepherd's didn't have the manpower to hold more than one fort at a time).

Then they did it three more times.

"Aye; and we're going to keep it this time! We got friends and followers on the other side, amiright Gheb ol-buddy-ol-pal?"

"Eh? Oh…yeah…tons of 'em. All dem bitches love me." Gheb promised much and delivered nothing. "Course if ya' want my Ghebbernauts, ya' better make it worth my while…"

"We've BEEN making it worth your while! Where the hell are these Gebbernauts we keep hearing about!? I haven't seen a damned one take the field!" Sully was beginning to suspect they were being played. Gheb had demanded payment for his Ylissean loyalty in the form of embezzled war funds, hard drugs, and scantily clad women. And Vaike had obliged. But for all the fat man's talk of being this revered figure who supposedly commanded hordes of devoted followers and could bolster their cause with a word, he had yet to do anything other than take their money and indulge his—habits—under their protection.

"You said you could win the Old Guard over. Thats not whats happening…at all…" Gaius agreed. "We need proof that you can do what you say you can do. Because right here—right now—you are NOT worth what we are paying you."

"***Proof***—ye snivelin' shits are still alive—there's yer proof." Gheb guffawed. "Now if you don't WANT my hordes of devoted followers…I can take my smexiness elsewhere…"

"Hey now; don't listen to these knuckleheads! We WANT your hordes of devoted followers!" Vaike played ball. "You and your men hold Rigwald for Ylisse—name your price—ol Teach is good for it!"

"There's a smart lad!" Gheb snorted the last of the powder he had swiped from Gaius. "OY; this coke is GARBAGE!"

"..thats because its sugar…" Gaius had tried to explain that the white granular packet wasn't what he thought it was when he swiped it.

"Aye…sugar…I'll have some of that now!" Gheb gave a startled Olivia a firm slap on the ass and jiggled his man-boobs. "Mmmmm…mmmmmmm….there's some titties! Shake it girl; come to daddy! "

" We'll getcha...uhhh...somethin'…" Vaike reopened negotiations with Gheb and gave the Shepherds their orders to move out.

"…That it the most vile man I have ever known…" Olivia vented. "And I haven't met a single Magvelian who doesn't hate him as much as we do. Why are we working with him?"

"He has followers. They're as disgusting as he as, but he has followers. We NEED Magvelians to pledge for us." Tharja reminded her. "Hes rude, crude, and offensive to everyone. But hes the closest thing to a Ylisse-friendly leader in Grado. And we can't throw that away."

"He doesn't care about Ylisse! The only reason he's friendly is because we keep bribing him with cocaine and hookers!" Stahl was just slightly perturbed that Gheb had mistaken his wife for a hooker.

"And us bribing him with cocaine and hookers is the only reason we have a Magvelian faction fighting the Lyonans." Tharja wasn't Vaike; she knew full well what they were dealing with. She also knew the costs of refusing to deal.

"I don't think the Gehebbernauts are any **better** than the Lyonans." Gaius opined. "I mean…sure…they're not religious fanatics who cut your head off for watching stickball. But they're looters and insane cokefiends. And if that's who we're willing to put in power to keep the Lyonans out of power, I don't think we're doing ***ANY*** good here. We're just swapping one villain for another."

"And not for nothing but; what have these Ghebbernauts actually *done* for us?" Sully piled on "They take our gold, they run from every fight, we're more hated now then we were before we put them on-the-pay…"

"We need them." Tharja stood firm. "Try not to overthink it—lets just—take Rigwald. *Again*."

"Whatever. I'm not leading another charge on Rigwald until I take a dump," Sully announced with great manliness, and made the mistake of marching on over to the latrines. **"NOOOOOO!"** What she found inside broke her spirits, sent her into the fetal position, and would haunt her nightmares for years to come. "**NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO!"**

"...Get the orange potion..." Tharja sighed. She was afraid something like this might happen.

"I'm sorry…What just happened?" Gaius was confused.

"Either strange things are happening from the use of high-level dark magic as toilet paper, or Gheb has defecated in a manner which defies standard physics." Libra warped away the non-euclidean horror that was his voided bowels.

Gheb BWAHAHA-ed.

"You're sure you want to do this?" Laurent read over the latest reports from Magvel, as Chrom prepared the Form of Order that would commit 10,000 Ylissean soldiers to the war effort. It was BAD.

"Positive." Chrom affixed his signature to the documents. To his credit: he read first.

"Did you see Tharja's account of the 4th Siege of Rigwald?" it was sickening. "The Lyonans used child soldiers. One of their lancers was an orphan girl from Silva. Gheb demanded her as payment for holding the siege."

"The sooner we get our own men in there, the sooner we can stop relying on Gheb." Chrom wasn't blind to the unseemly elements they were working with to make up for lack of manpower.

"As you say…and yet…" Laurent produced Miriel's latest tracking poll. "I would be remiss in my duties as counsel if I did not show you this."

DO YOU SUPPORT SENDING ADDITIONAL YLISSEAN TROOPS TO MAGVEL?

YES: 22%

NO: 78%

"That's unfortunate." Chrom was disheartened. But not dissuaded. "But I'd be a piss-poor Exalt if I governed by the polls on issues that demand leadership and resolve. We take the hit."

"…So be it…" Laurent accepted Chrom's Form of Order and made to have it delivered under seal.

"Lady Robin—here to see you." Frederick announced.

"See her in," Chrom supposed they were going to have to have the *Morgan* talk sooner or later. Might as well get it over with.

"Chrom." Robin bowed curtly. She was scheming something; Chrom knew it as soon as he saw her.

"Playing humble today?" Chrom was on guard. "What do you want?"

"I want to be redeployed back to Magvel."

Bullshit. "Why?"

"I've told you all along; do it right, or don't do it at all. You're surging troops into Magvel. You need someone who knows

what to do with them" Robin explained herself. "I've read the reports; its been one mismanaged mess after another. If you surge troops without changing commanders, you're just going to have a bigger mismanaged mess. That's why when the boots hit the ground, I will personally command from the front."

"…"

"This is just about the mission. Nothing more."

"I don't believe you." *If it was just about the mission, you never would have left Vaike in charge in the first place.*

"I don't care if you believe me."

She's not asking about Morgan. Why isn't she asking about Morgan? "That's ALL you wanted to talk to me about. Nothing else?"

"Nothing else."

"…"

"…"

"…"

"…"

"You're pregnant with your first child, you're still campaigning, AND you want me to send you back to Magvel?" For the life of him, Chrom could not see what she was playing at.

"Are we gonna stand around all day jerking each other off, or are you gonna let me do my job?" Robin was still Lord Commander of the Ylissean Guard.

"…"

"…"

"…"

"…"

"Go." Chrom allowed it. "Do the Halidom proud."

"Of course," Robin bowed and excused herself.

"Huh…That was weird…" Chrom sought out his head steward.

"An odd request, milord?" Frederick did not know what Robin had asked of him.

"Very odd." *Why didn't she ask me about Morgan?* "Frederick; wheres my son?"

"…"

"***Half-Brother***." Chrom caught himself. He was sure no one else was listening, but Frederick the wary was right to be cautious.

"The boy just joined the Ylissean Guard. Frederick informed his King. "He deploys to Magvel come the morrow."

Chapter 19: Chapter 19

WARNING: Gheb is offensive to everyone. Continue.

Robin for Exalt

"There are no words to express the abyss between isolation and having one ally. It may be conceded to the mathematician that four is twice two. But two is not twice one; two is two thousand times one." -G.K. Chesterton-

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"Rigwald has been LIBERATED!" Vaike flew the Ylissean flag over the province's namesake fort. "Now, in a responsible move that shows our commitment to leaving Magvelians in charge of Magvel and will never come back to bite Ylisse in the ass, I hereby name The Great Gheb 2nd district vice-magistrate and acting governor of Rigwald Province."

"The Great Gheb! Bwahahah, I like the sound of that!" the fat bastard ascended his throne and tugged on the leash tethered to him. "Come Loli! To my side!"

Gheb's payment followed silently with eyes that shouted *Help Me.*

"That's the one?" Robin watched Gheb—in his first act as a man of political power—bend an enslaved orphan over his knee and snort blow off of her backside.

"That's the one." Tharja affirmed.

"He shouldn't be doing that." Morgan frowned.

"Greedy, stupid and easily bought." Robin approved. "Yes…he'll do..."

"That's a BAD man!" Morgan protested.

"A terrible man." Robin agreed. "A terrible, terrible man with big ambitions and a tiny brain. And there lies his usefulness."

"But—"

"Oi! Whose the kid!?" Vaike caught sight of Morgan.

"My apprentice." Robin had her cover-story down.

"…Looks like Chrom…" Vaike didn't even need to see the Brand of the Exalt.

"It's his bastard half-brother."

"…looks like Chrom if he was half-Plegian…"

"Very well might be; its Mikolos's bastard."

"…"

"…"

"…"
"…That's your son…"

"My ***apprentice***." Robin denied it.

"Hah; your ***apprentice!*** What are ya teachin' him; how to fuck the King? Hah! Hahahahahaha!HAHAHAHAHAHA!" Vaike knew how he was going to win now.

"If it's that obvious to ***Vaike***, you aren't fooling anyone." Tharja spoke truthfully once Vaike was out of earshot.

"I have not made an issue out of Nowi. Remind Vaike that I can, if he wants to make an issue out of Morgan. And ask him how he thinks ***rumored adulterer*** stacks up against ***rumored child molester***."

"As you will. What about the fat man?" Tharja regarded Gheb—in his second act as a man of political power—placing his

cock in sculptor's clay and decreeing that the imprint left therein be made the new provincial seal.

"Chrom believes now that we're surging Ylissean knights, we should cast him aside. What do you believe?" Robin asked.

"I believe the longer we're here, the more we're hated. I believe there's no scenario where we benefit from a long-term presence in Grado. I believe we need to leave soon but there's no good way to do it—only bad and worse. And I believe that leaving a Ylissean-backed strongman in charge to fight by proxy is the best bad option we have for declaring victory, saving face, and going home without demon-worshippers seizing power after we leave. " Tharja explained herself (so persuading Vaike without hexes or charms had been a feat-and-a-half).

"Tharja…I love you..." *That's the right of it. And you even found the perfect stooge.*

"Have you given any more thought to my—other proposal?" Tharja pressed.

"After the election." Robin promised. "And come on…not in front of the kid..."

"Huh?" Morgan was curious now.

"Don't worry about it." Robin approached Gheb, requested a private audience, and beckoned for Morgan to follow as the fat man waddled off to a backroom. "Watch mommy work."

"Gheb the Great—NO—Gheb the Boner King! Aye; that's got a nice ring to it! BWAHAHAH!" Gheb was almost too high to function, and still not sated. At least he was doing lines off a proper table this time (the payment was now being used as a footrest).

"A king needs a kingdom. This provincial backwater will not do for a man of your stature." Robin spun dreams in his head. "Vigarde's Keep. The Empire's Reach. All of Grado should be yours."

"Aye! AYE! Gheb the Boner King, Emperor of Grado! A great thing! A fine thing! My cock could be a national treasure!"

"Oh; but the Lyonans would never allow it! They would have to be—whats the word—***suppressed***."

"Suppressed, flogged, and fucked bloody! " Gheb agreed.

"You would need an army."

"Oi! You just brought an army!"

"That's right; I did, didn't I?" *You want it you stupid-son-of-a-bitch. You want it so bad.* "An army to—what was it now—restore law-and-order in Grado? Fill the power void left by Vigarde's fall? Keep the demon-worshippers out of power and Fomortis chained to his swamp?" Robin spelled it out for him "If there was a man of Grado fielding Magvelians against the Fomortian Cults. AND if his service in the field suggested a propensity for leadership. AND if he pledged before me to rule with unwavering loyalty to Ylisse and swift justice against our enemies. I do believe that if I ordered 10,000 Ylissean knights to make a clean sweep from Rigwald to the Imperial City and sit him on the High Throne of Grado, I could go home and tell King Chrom that the War in Magvel is over. We won."

Gheb needed no further persuasion to pledge his loyalty.

"There are…conditions…" Robin instructed. "It is Ylisse that raises you, and Ylisse you serve. You will be free to govern your—people—as you please, to the extent you do not contravene Ylissean policy. But any policy so issued you must support, and govern pursuant thereto."

"Done." Gheb agreed.

"You will maintain such levels of security that no dissident sect may purport to hold territory or execute law, with an unconditional right of reentry for agents of the Exalt should Ylisse assess further need to bolster your efforts.

"Done." Gheb agreed.

"Your conduct will not shame us and will demonstrate respect for Ylissean values. These Ylissean values…" Robin produced a list of **DO**s and **DON'T**s

"…"

"…"

"…"

"…"

"No." Gheb refused, upon review.

"No?"

"No slave trading; No killing the queers; NO RAPE!?"

"These are things which are frowned upon by the laws of civilized nations." Robin explained.

"BUGGER THAT!" Gheb crumbled up the list and pounded the table. "KISS MY ASS, YA FAIRIES!"

And he ranted and raved and threw a fit.

"Are you done?" Robin was unfazed

"Aye." Gheb settled down. "How 'bout we make them rules negotiable?"

"This is not a negotiation. This is me telling you how its going to be." Robin played hardball. *I'm offering you a fucking throne…you're not going to say NO…*

"So what—I break yer faggoty rules, and ya do to me what you did to Vigarde?"

"That very much depends on you; what you're bringing to the table." The rules, Robin knew, weren't quite as airtight as they appeared on paper. "The Khans are our ***friends***. The Khans have been known to rape and plunder. But the Khans were the first to pledge for Ylisse when the Grimleal raised their banners; so it is said that Regna Ferox shares our Ylissean values, and we break bread. Queen Say'ri is our ***friend***. Chon'sin just annexed the Ormosan Isles and laid claim to their sugar trade and jailed all who raised a protest. But Queen Say'ri was the first to pledge for Ylisse when we made landfall in Valm; so it is said that Chon'sin shares our Ylisean values, and we break bread. Vigarde's Grado was no more rapacious then Regna Ferox and no more invasive then Chon'sin. But Vigarde was NOT a ***friend*** of Ylisse. Understood?"

"So that's how it is, eh?" Gheb understood alright. "No doubts about it then. Gheb the Boner King is your true-and-honest ***friend***."

"…So he is…" *But are you? Are you really?* "Let me tell you a story. There was a girl named Severa. Severa got it in her head that—Ylissean politics being what they were—she could play the system and get a taste of the good life. She was gonna scratch my back and I was gonna scratch hers. And I told her: ***don't you fuck me***. And you know what she did? The little brat got it in her head that she could hold out for more if she played the other side. She fucked me. Now Severa lives in Regna Ferox, and not by choice. She can't even show her face in Ylisse; oh how the mobs will torment her if she tries. Because she fucked me."

"…"

"Let me tell you another story." Robin summoned Morgan to her side. *Some would say I should not be taking cues on motherhood from Tharja. They can suck a sack.* "The circumstances of this child's birth were…most unusual. He carries the blood of Exalted Naga and Grima, Destoyer of Worlds. I don't suppose you know who they are. No matter. Suffice it to say he's a very special boy. But listen to me carry on; I'm rambling. I guess what I'm really trying to say is…"

Robin cast Grima's Truth upon her son and he manifested the form of the Fel Dragon. In a fury he fell upon Gheb, bashing him clear through the negotiating table and savagely mauling him by fang and claw and horn. He grabbed the fat man by the head and backhanded him with razor-black dragonscale and tossed him into a wall. Then the Brand of the Exalt reasserted itself, and Morgan collapsed unconscious in his human form.

"**Don't Fuck Me."** Robin stood over a crying Gheb with her thunder crackling. "**Don't you EVER try to Fuck Me**." Having so made her point, she grabbed Morgan in one hand and his slave-girl's leash in the other. "I'm taking your Loli." She made a point of kicking Gheb while he was down. Figuratively and Literally.

"Did that boy just turn into demon!?" was, unsurprisingly, the first thing the liberated slave-girl wanted to know.

"You're welcome." was all Robin had to say about that.

"Is he…is he going to be okay?" she worried.

"He'll be fine. And he'll wake up with no memory of what just happened." Robin took stock of the girl. *Freed from Gheb and her first concern is for Morgan? Such a kind, caring soul. There's not a streak of Severa in this one; she will never play me false.* "What's your name?"

"…Amelia…"

"Amelia. You darling precious child…you've been through so much..." *Too much. Too much known, and too much to tell.* "I would like very much to offer you compensations for your pain and suffering. So pretty…you look like a princess. Has anyone ever told you, you look like a princess?"

"T-t-truly!? You think I could be a princess!?"

"Oh yes… I can see it now…you in a great big castle with ponies and ball gowns and royal banquets. Why—my good friend Maribelle would make a proper lady out of you! You'd be the loveliest damsel in court; every prince in the realm would fight for your hand."

"You would do that!? For me!? Ahhh…but you've already done so much! How could I ever repay you?"

There we go. "There is…one small thing…" Robin mentioned. "When we get back to Ylisse King Chrom is going to have certain—questions—about Grado's new King. This is what you're going to tell him. And this is what you ***AREN'T*** going to tell him."

"Back already?" Laurent received Robin's return.

"War's over. We won."

"...Indeed…"

"This is the report for Chrom." Robin gave Laurent her accounting of the war's end. "I understand there were some unflattering accounts of our good friend and ally King Gheb that reached Chrom before my deployment. Chrom should know; these reports were written by Vaike and are the product of a defective mind. I've taken the liberty of correcting the record."

"I do not doubt that you've taken many liberties." Laurent sighed. His job was tiring and he was growing more worried by the day about Nah; there had been other incidents since the bar. She had a problem. "The King will be so informed."

"Whewww…Glad that's over…" Robin was relieved. "Hopefully Chrom learned his lesson about reckless interventionism. He should know better than to make a habit of sticking Ylisse's nose in everyone elses problems now."

"GRANDMASTER! LORD COMMANDER!" a booming Frederick summoned the both of them. "The King has convened a special council to discuss the terms of Ylissean intervention in Tellius! He requests your attendance!"

Chapter 20: Chapter 20

There are three things to know before you read this chapter.

1) It is my intention to keep this fic open-endeed through the 2016 presidential campaign cycle. (Ted Cruz and friends are already pumping out material that just begs to be lampooned)

2) The views expressed by characters in this chapter do not necessarily reflect the views of the author.

3) Vaike is a fucking Moron.

Robin For Exalt

"Conspiracy Theories are better than Sex. For some people. Not for me." –Dom Giordano-

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"Why am I here?" Robin was under the impression the King wasn't coming to her for policy advice anymore. *Laurent, Lucina, Sumia, Frederick, Basilio, Hierarch Haggerty...theres no shortage of advisors here.*

"I've called all who give me good counsel." Chrom sat the head of the long table with the queen at his right hand. "You're an insubordinate shit, but you're still one of the sharpest minds in the realm."

"I see." *Chrom is taking this seriously. He's in no mood for games today, but…* "Then why is Sumia here?"

"Fuck you!" Sumia wasn't having any of that.

"PEACE!" Chrom silenced the both of them. This was Council Chambers; here he was not a jilted ex-lover or a whipped shell of a husband. Here he was King. "Sumia; you know why you're here. Robin; you're ***late***. Take your seat."

"*She's here because she's blowing you*." Robin muttered under her breath, working her way around the table.

"What was that?" Sumia bid her speak up.

Three days. We were broken up for three days. You couldn't wait one to get your hands down his pants and two more to get a ring on your finger, you fat skank. "I said I like your hairpins." Robin took the open seat on the left next to Chrom, by force of habit.

"What are you doing?" Chrom gave her a queer look.

"Taking my seat." Robin told him.

Laurent awkwardly cleared his throat. The rest of the table stared at her.

"What?" *This is my seat.*

"That's the g***randmaster's*** seat." Chrom reprimanded.

"I AM…Oh…" *That's right. Son-of-a-Bitch.* "…Right…" Robin half-heartedly excused herself, ceded the seat to Laurent, and took the next seat down at the grandmaster's side.

"We were discussing events on Magvel; apologies for our tardiness, Your Grace." Laurent spoke on her behalf.

You little suck-up. Robin glared.

"Magvel is yesterday's news. We've got new problems. FREDERICK!" Chrom already knew what his head steward was going to say. The rest didn't.

"Ten days ago, Gallia declared independence and named Lion King Priam lawful sovereign of the Gallian state." Frederick marked up the contested territory on a map of Tellius. "The Crimean League immediately issued a statement that no such state exists and declared war against Lionism. 8,000 Gallians and 20,000 Crimeans have since been killed in the fighting. 3 million Crimeans have been displaced."

"You mean ***forced off their land***." Hierarch Haggerty recalled the promise Priam had made the day he appeared in Ylisstol to appear before King Chrom. "Priam played you false. He never meant to make friends and neighbors of the native Crimeans. This was his plan all along—strip them of their holdings and cast them out."

"That is the Crimean account. The Gallians tell a different tale." Frederick so informed. "It is said that the Crimean League invaded with a pledge that those who fled to Taguel-free lands would return to Taguel- free lands—for the Crimean League would so overwhelm the Lionists in a war of annihilation as to scour them from the Earth—and those who stayed would be presumed allies of the Taguel and slaughtered. The displaced are those who sided with the League. The beorc citizens of Gallia are those who stood with the Taguel."

"So there are still beorc living unmolested in Gallia?" Queen Sumia thought that most telling.

"One million, your grace." Frederick affirmed. "Native Crimean beorc are currently twenty percent of the Taguel State's population."

"Then Priam has done exactly what he told us he would do. No more; no less." Chrom would allow this.

"This is preposterous! Three million Crimeans made exiles in their own homeland; how if not by Gallian design!?" Hierarch Haggerty spoke against the Exalt. "Priam hath said by their own hand—where is the sense in that!? You'd believe three million Crimean's were stupid and spiteful to the point of self-destruction before believing that taguel lie!"

"Look at the bloody map, ya sot!" The reason for Crimean flight was plain enough to Basilio. It could only be a testament to the truth of Priam's words that any had stayed at all. "Imagine yer'self a man in the crossfire—no allegiances—just lookin' to stay alive. Gallia says ya stay, yer a Gallian; ya leave, yer an exile. Crimea says ya stay, ya die with the Taguel; ya leave, ain't no Taguel when ya come home. Watcha gonna do? ***Look at the map.***"

"—Leave." Lucina saw it. "Four armies against one; the Elincians from the North, the Nephenese from the South, the Kerrians and the Haarthi from the East…"

"The Crimean League had every advantage. A Gallian victory was unthinkable." Laurent saw it too. That Gallia had risen up and overcome and left the Crimean armies in defeat defied every conceivable avenue of military planning. "If there was a future to be had it was with The League. Thinking this, even natives with no particular hatred of the Taguel would have fled."

"...And now the displaced are demanding a right-of-return." Chrom outlined the issue pending. "King Priam says this would be an impermissible security risk for the Gallian people and insists that those who sided with the Crimean League must be taken in by the Crimean League. The Crimean League refuses, and says the Taguel are illegally occupying Gallestinian land. The displaced have settled the Gallian-Elincian border and have elected a Gallestinian Authority to self-govern. They say—and I quote—" Chrom read from their founding charter. "*Gallia exists and continues to exist until Ashera's Faithful annihilate it. The day of judgement will not come until the faithful fight the Taguel; killing the Taguel. The Taguel will hide behind rocks and trees. And the trees will cry out:* ***'Oh Great Ones! Oh Abdullah! There is a Taguel behind me; Come and kill him!'"***

So speaking, Chrom produced a blank Scroll of Royal Proclomation and a quill pen.

"This is the Ylissean Crown's position statement on the matter. No one is leaving this room until we figure out what that is."

...And then everyone began shouting at him at the same time.

"Invest in economic development and education in Crimea!" Laurent counseled. "The problem is one of religious fanaticism; underdevelopment produces the conditions where such thinking thrives. Give a man a living wage and a trade, and Holy War loses its luster. Otherwise this will go on for generations…"

"Throw money at them; that's yer answer!? Would you fight the Grimleal with milk and honey!?" Basilio guffawed. "This is WAR! The Gallestinians are the enemy. In war you kill yer enemy. Aye—there's a way to make sure this doesn't drag on for generations—send in the tigers and be done with it. There's no Crimean army left to stop 'em."

"The way to be done with it is to give the Crimeans their land back!" Hierarch Haggerty urged a reversal of course. "Gallian statehood was a mistake. Whatever crimes have been committed against the Taguel; this is not the answer. At the *very least* we must recognize the Gallestinian Authority and support a two-state solution."

"We can't support an indefinite Gallian occupation with no right-of-return for Gallestinian refugees. The Taguel did no wrong in raising Gallia, but that isn't right." Lucina saw both sides. "We also can't support Gallestinian statehood while their governing faction promotes religious violence against the Taguel and has no intention of making peace with Gallia. The moderates—the ones who fled their homes for fear of The League with no ill-will against the Taguel—we need them to come to power. Our position should be support for a two-state solution and a right-of-return, contingent upon the Gallestinian Authority recognizing Gallia's right to exist and self-policing its radicals."

"Of for fuck's sake; just **STAY OUT OF IT!**" Robin shouted. "You think you know who the good guys are and you think you're doing the right thing…next thing you know you're cutting deals with cokefiends and using orphans as foot-rests. There's no Ylissean interest. There's no reason for us to get involved. Beorc and Laguz have been killing each other for thousands of years and they aren't going to stop…you can't fix everything that's wrong with the world with Ylissean gold and soldiers. **STAY! OUT OF IT!**"

"We're getting involved." Chrom singled out Robin's position and only Robin's position for rebuke.

"Fix your own problems before you try to fix someone elses!"Robin pushed Laurent—calling for peace—out of her way and got right up in Chrom's face. "Our roads are broken, our schools are failing, and we owe Chon'Sin 50 million gold. Why are we even talking about sending aid to Tellius!"

"An injustice anywhere is an injustice everywhere!" Chrom got right back in hers. "Death and hatred don't become lesser evils then broken roads because they're happening beyond our borders!"

"So—what—anytime something bad happens anywhere in the world, its Ylisse's problem!?" Robin could count on one hand the number of countries that weren't going to shit. "There's a Dark Druid in Lycia eating Dragon Souls and terrorizing the High Lords. Watcha gonna do; call the Ylissean Guard!?"

"…Maybe?"

"That's ridiculous. You're RIDICULOUS!"

"Hey! At Least I'm TRYING!"

"I'm also trying! I'm trying to stop you from making another big fuck-off mess like you did in Magvel…"

"YOU made the mess in Magvel!"

"Oh don't even start! You're doing it again; I can't believe you're doing this again! You haven't learned a DAMN THING!"

"**Peace**!" Laurent interjected himself in vain.

"YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW!" now Chrom too pushed Laurent out of the way; the better to shout at Robin. "YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW WHAT I DO TO KEEP THIS COUNTRY SAFE!"

"OF COURSE I KNOW, BECAUSE YOU CAN'T DO ANYTHING WITHOUT ME!"

"FUCK YOU!"

"FUCK YOU!"

"OH MY GOD…YOU ARE SUCH A BITCH!"

"YOU. SUCK. AT. YOUR. JOB."

"*Those two seriously just need to fuck already*." Basilio whispered just a little bit too loudly to Haggerty, earning a backhand from Sumia.

SLASH!

Parallel Falchion came out, and the room was pacified.

"…Our position statement…" Lucina—of all people—was the adult in the room. She put forth Chrom's blank Scroll of Royal Proclamation; no longer blank. "Mother?"

"…"

"…"

"…"

"This is….oh…uhhhhh…very good, honey…" Sumia was in fact only there for the reason Robin believed she was there.

"Lets see; Paragraph #2 is poorly worded… Paragraph #4 is ambiguous…Paragraph #5 is overbroad…" Haggerty offered a more substantive critique.

"Ambiguity is good." Lucina advised. "It means our position is open to interpretation. It means we can be flexible."

"…so it does…" Haggerty approved.

"Heh...this isn't half bad..." Basilio joined.

"Hmmm…acceptable…" Robin could sign off on it. "Chrom?"

"Its…a good start…" Chrom took up the pen—his spat with Robin forgotten—and it was back to business.

And so they did the work they had set out to do.

"Annnndddd…its done…" Five hours later, Chrom held up the near-finished product.

"Whewww…we really pulled together there! Good job team!" Robin played the peacemaker.

"…" Lucina glared, wordlessly.

"...Right then…" Chrom was all but ready to affix his seal. "So…how do we feel about the changes to Paragraph…"

"OY! Whaddaya think yer doin'; passin' public policy without ol' Teach!" It was Vaike Time.

"Who let him in here!?" Chrom demanded.

"Go away Vaike…the grown-ups are talking..." Robin Shoo-ed.

"Talkin' NONSENSE! Dontcha know!? Them Lionists are conspirin' to take over the world! Ain't none of watcha just said true...ya just think its true 'cause Lionists control the banks and the media!"

"…Of course they do…" Robin mocked. "Let me guess. You heard this on **Info Wars**, between *Conspiracy of the Lizard Illuminati* and *Real Bigfoot Hunters of Regna Ferox*."

"Seriously…who let him in here?" Chrom wasn't asking rhetorically.

"...am I wrong?" Robin prodded.

"ALEX JONES IS A RELIABLE SOURCE!" Vaike was Vaike. "THE GOVERNMENT IS USING CHEMICALS TO CREATE GAY PEOPLE! 9/11 WAS AN INSIDE JOB! THE LIONISTS KNOW! THE LIONISTS KNOW! THE LIONISTS…"

"**Guards!"** Chrom summoned Frederick and Company, and Vaike was dragged out of the throne room; kicking and screaming about fluoridated water and FEMA concentration camps and Satan-worshipping atheists.

"…"

"…"

"…"

"Whats he polling at?" Chrom asked.

"Twenty-Seven Percent." Robin answered.

"Fuck this country."

Chapter 21: Chapter 21

No. I'm not going to write about Donald Trump. There's too much Trump. I'm sick of it. And there's not even a point to parodying him. He's already a parody of himself.

I'm doing this instead.

Robin For Exalt

"O**ne of the good things about Obamacare is that the statute provided that members of Congress would be on the exchanges…We'll be getting new health insurance and we'll presumably do it through my job with the Senate…yes I'll get my insurance through my job like millions of other Americans. I believe we should follow the text of the law I strongly oppose."** –Leading opponent of Obamacare Senator Ted Cruz, on CNN, explaining why he signed his family up for Obamacare-

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"They kicked me out of the meeting! ME! Out of the meeting! No respect; I can't get no respect from nobody!" Vaike was outraged.

"Soooo you're done playing Exalt?" Nowi didn't like this game. "We can play house again?"

"I AM A LEGITAMITE CANDIDATE! I HAVE IDEAS!" Vaike wasn't listening.

"The bills aren't getting paid, and the roof is leaking, and I think there might be something wrong with Nah…" Nowi tried to get through to him.

"Fuckin' Chrom—selling us out to the Gallians—what does he think he's playing at? OH GOD; that's why he sent us to Magvel, isn't it? ITS ALL PART OF THE LIONIST CONSPIRACY!" Vaike wasn't getting it.

Nowi huffed and pouted.

"Hey guys; I've been peeing ALOT of blood lately. Is that normal?" Nah coughed. If either of her parents had an eye for detail, they would have noticed that she was a sickly shade of yellow and much, much skinnier than usual.

"Eh; that? You're just becoming a woman." Vaike did not have an eye for detail. "Talk to your mother."

"That's not what this…***ARGHHHH!***" Nah keeled over screaming and clutching her side with a heaving sob. "***IT HURTS! IT HURTS SO—"*** Nah tried to vomit on an empty stomach and dry-heaved into a fainting spell.

"Nah!?" Vaike tried to shake her out of it.

"…" She wasn't moving.

"Nah?"

"…"

"FOR GOD'S SAKE VAIKE; TAKE HER TO A HOSPITAL!"

"Hey there…buck up kiddo!" Vaike tried to put Nowi in a good mood in the waiting room at St. Elimine's Memorial Hospital.

"…"

"I told ya; every little thing's gonna be alright!"

"She's really sick." Nowi was scared.

"Ain't a better place on Naga's green earth to be sick! We got the best healthcare system in the world right here in Ylisse; just you watch!" Vaike looked around him. He appeared to be in a hospital staffed almost entirely by Elibeans."Least we did until Chromcare ruined it. Can't even get treated by Ylisseans now. Look at all these damn foreign healers. Those should be jobs for Ylisse."

"Not now, Vaike." Nowi was worried sick herself.

"Mr. and Mrs. Vaike?" A girl way to cheery to be carrying the news she was carrying greeted them. Her nametag read *Nurse Nino*. "The doctor will see you now!"And so she led them back to Nah's room.

"Dr. Canas." Vaike on his best behavior extended a friendly hand to the monocled man. Foreign job-stealer or not, this was the man who was going to be saving his daughter's life in this greatest healthcare system on Naga's green Earth. That counted for something. Right?

"Mr. Vaike." Canas was appropriately grim.

"Is it that bad?" even Vaike could not be oblivious to his tone.

"Mr. Vaike—there's—no easy way to say this." Canas got straight to the point. "Your daughter is in acute renal failure."

"Eh? What's that now?"

"Her kidneys stopped working and they aren't responding to healing magic," Canas explained in layman's terms. "Without treatment she'll be dead in 72 hours."

"My BABY! WHYYYYYY!?" Nowi began crying and crying and could not stop.

"Hey, hey hey! He said *without treatment*. That means they can fix it!" Vaike for once in his life was the voice of reason. "You can fix it, right?"

"We…have a procedure…" Canas answered with measured reservation.

"Okay." Vaike wasn't hearing a ***No***.

"We can—and I need you to keep an open mind here. This is going to sound really weird. I've done this before. I swear, it works." Canas managed expectations. The procedure was still very new. And Ylisseans sill of a mind that if it wasn't a stave or a potion, it was unholy. "What we can do is we can put your wife into a drug-induced coma, surgically remove one of healthy kidneys, and put it in Nah. You only need one to live. Our tests indicate that Nowi is a perfect match. That is—of course—if Nowi consents to being an organ donor."

"She'll live if I do it?" Nowi dried her tears.

"The procedure has a 90% success rate." Canas told it true.

"See!?What did I tell ya? Best healthcare system in the world!" Vaike lauded. "That's some cutting edge stuff right there. You can't get that if you're dying in Plegia. Hell…you won't be able to get that here if we keep lettin' in all them Plegians."

"I'll just need a copy of your insurance." Canas probably should have mentioned that earlier.

"Eh?'

"You do have insurance, right?"

"Pftttt…*insuranc*e." All Vaike knew about insurance was it was that thing that Chromcare made you buy. I ain't giving no fat-cat bureaucrat my hard-earned money to run my healthcare. "I got 5,000 in cash. That'll do it right?"

"The procedure is 120,000 in gold, out-of-pocket." Canas informed.

"Ha! Haha! HAHAHAHA!"

"…"

"Seriously; what do I owe ya?"

"120,000 gold out-of-pocket. With insurance, you pay a 2,500 deductible and the rest is covered by the merchant's guild. We accept Azure Cross, Azure Shield, EmblemHealth, and Chromcare Premium." And then Canas attempted to explain healthcare financing to a man who couldn't spell *financing*.

"Hold up, hold up. You're telling me if I buy from the merchant's guild you can do watcha gotta do for 2,500. But you can't do it for 5,000 right now?" Vaike wasn't a thinking man. But he was pretty sure that didn't make any god-damn sense.

"You need to pay your deductible to submit your claim so that St. Elimine's Memorial gets reimbursed for covered services." Canas explained it again. "The hospital won't authorize an uncovered procedure. You need to get coverage so you can pay your deductible so we can…"

"…What if the merchant's guild WASN'T running a market on—what was it now—*coverage*?" Vaike butted in. "What if insurance wasn't a thing."

"Then you would give me 5,000 gold and I would perform surgery on your daughter." Canas stated plainly. "Insurance is a thing."

"…Bahhhhh…" There was no other way then. "You're really not going to do this unless I get covered?"

"I'm afraid it's not that simple."

"What kind of a doctor are you!?"

"The kind that doesn't make laws." Canas answered with an edge of snark. "Truthfully I'd prefer single-payer. You called that—what was it now—*bleeding-heart libtard communism?*"

"***Urghhhhhhhhh***," Nah groaned the hospital bed. "***Dying hurts."***

"What CAN I get for 5,000 gold?" Vaike asked.

"5,000?" Canas actually had to think about that.

"5,000."

"…*Uhhhhhhhh*…" Canas blinked. "For 2,000, you can buy a really nice coffin."

Nowi started crying again.

"HEY! Guild-man! I need insurance." Vaike left Nowi with Nah at the hospital and marched straight on over to the Merchant's Guild.

"...Okayyyy…" a confused merchant watched Vaike try to haggle with him like he was buying a pair of boots or an axe. "Did you speak to an actuary?"

"What-now?"

"You need to speak to an actuary to perform a risk assessment to assign you to a premium pool and set your deductible. THEN you can buy a coverage policy."

"Look man; I just want a new kidney for my daughter. Who do I gotta talk to to make that happen?"

"You have to speak to an actuary to perform a risk assessment to assign…"

"I heard ya the first time. Fuckin Chromcare," Vaike spent the better part of a half hour trying to find an actuary. He found: "ANNA!?"

"Hellooooooo sweetie!" It was indeed Anna.

"Frederick killed you! There were RIOTS!"

"Frederick killed one of the Annas. Theres—like—twenty of us." This Anna was making her fortune counting coin for the Merchant's Guild. It was a good gig.

"I feel stupid for even asking, but…" Vaike had so many questions. One was clearly more important than the others at the moment. "Are you an actuary?"

"Of course, handsome! Tehe-he; that'll be a 40 gold service fee. It should be a 75 gold service fee, but you have such big muscles…"

"Done." Vaike didn't even question it. Forty gold poorer, he asked "Can Nah get a new kidney now?"

"…Let see…" Anna started moving numbers and adjusting figures. "Open enrollment for Chromcare is closed. You don't

qualify for an exemption."

"I ain't using no stinking Chromcare." Vaike spat.

"You CAN'T use Chromcare. You have to use one of the old plans." Anna told him. "Youuuuu…do qualify for EmblemHealth Silver. We can sign you up for a zero deductible plan with 20% out-of-pocket. Zero deductible; isn't that great! Chromcare is 2,500. You'd be crazy to take that over our plan." Anna neglected to explain that with the out-of-pocket clause, EmblemHealth Silver would in fact leave Vaike with a 24,000 gold hospital bill.

"Fantastic! Sign me up!" Vaike paid another 300 gold. "Can Nah get her kidney now?"

"Noooooooo. You didn't buy EmblemHealth Silver until AFTER your daughter needed treatment." Anna smiled a poisonous smile.

"So?"

"That means it's a preexisting condition. Preexisting conditions aren't covered by your plan. You need to upgrade to EmblemHealth Platinum."

"Fine upgrade me to EmblemHealth Platinum. Vaike paid another 100 gold. Can Nah get a new kidney now?"

"Sure, sweetie…" Anna giggled.

"FINALLY!" Vaike breathed a sigh of relief.

"…After we submit a claim for benefits to your HMO group."

"THE FUCK IS AN HMO GROUP!? I just wanna get my daughter a new kidney!" Vaike was getting angry.

"Healthcare Management Organization. All claims have to be reviewed by an HMO group." Anna explained.

"How long is that gonna to take!?"

"Well with standard processing fees—that's another 60 gold by the way—our quality control managers will have your claim reviewed and authorization for surgery out in, ohhhhhhhhhh, 2 to 3 weeks?"

"MY ASS…2 TO 3 WEEKS! A little girl—MY little girl—is going to die in 72 hours IF SHE DOESN'T GET A NEW KIDNEY! That's…" Vaike tried to do math. "…That's five days!"

"Ohhhhhhh. Then you want the ***expedited*** processing fee. That'll be $120 gold, plus it is still a preexisting condition so…"

"THIS IS ROBBERY!" Vaike flipped over Anna's desk and pulled out his axe and let lose a string of imaginative expletives. And was summarily kicked out of the merchant's guild.

He never did get that expedited processing fee.

"Hey…Chrom…best buddy…" Vaike made a last-ditch appeal to the exalt himself.

"Buddies, is it? We're not playing the game today?" Chrom put politics aside and greeted his old friend warmly.

"Heyyyy. You know we've had our differences. I don't agree with everything you've does as Exalt. I've been—loud—about it. Ya know its because I love ya like a brother and I think you can be the best." Vaike kissed ass. "Could you…maybe, kinda-sorta do me a solid? For old time's sake."

"Speak freely friend." for Vaike the candidate Chrom would play the world's smallest violin. For Vaike the friend Chrom would move mountains.

"Can you-errrrr—authorize surgery without going through the HMOs?"

"You think I can authorize surgery without going through the HMOs?" Chrom guffawed. "I'm The Exalt. Not God."

"Alright—Nowi—I think I got it!" Vaike made it back to the hospital with barely a day to spare and a suspicious amount of gold. "You're not gonna like it. I'm gonna owe favors to some really bad people and you're gonna probably have to start *dancing* again, but I think we can…ehhhh?"

Nah was awake and healthy and cuddling under a blanket with Laurent.

Nowi was happily munching on ice cream in a recovery bed and picking at a large scar on her belly.

Laurent was judging him.

"…how did you…" Vaike gaped.

"I married Nah and registered her as a spousal dependent on my Chromare premium plan." Laurent flashed his ring finger. It was banded with a wedding band. "The surgery was a success."

"*YOU USED CHROMCARE!"* Laurent might as well have just told him he sold his soul to Grima.

"It's really not that bad." Nowi opined.

"Worked for me." Nah agreed.

"IT'S THE WORST! Chromcare is the worst thing since slavery! NO; Chromcare IS slavery!" Vaike spoke in circles. "Its SLAVERY to big government, and it lets the nobles run every part of your life and its…wait a damn minute…" Vaike realized something mid-rant. "How'd ya get authorized so fast. Don't you have to—uhhhh—expedite the preexisting condition?" Vaike used words he didn't know and used them poorly.

"You can't discriminate against preexisting conditions under Chromcare." Laurent explained. "The law sets minimum standards for qualifying healthcare plans. That's one of the standards."

"Oh. Ohhhh. *Ohhhhhhhhh*." Vaike actually knew what that meant now. "Wait; THAT'S what the law does!?"

"Among other things." Laurent was one of the few people in Ylisse who had actually read the entire law. Chrom himself hadn't read the entire law. "There's also antifraud protections. So providers can't do things like claim zero deductible coverage and then spring 20,000 gold bills on you like those crooks at EmblemHealth."

"…Shit…" Vaike couldn't get off that plan for a full year.

"Not that anyone is falling for those scams anymore," Laurent added.

"Okay….so *MAYBE* the part of the law that saved my daughter's life isn't the worst thing since slavery." Vaike admitted.

"…"

"…"

"…"

"BUT IT'S STILL CRAP!"

Then there was girly laughter. Why was there girly laughter?

"Your father's a moron, Nah." A very familiar voice called out from behind the curtain separating Nah's bed from the next. The curtain pulled back to reveal a very amused, very pregnant Robin; spread-legged and with some kind of gel rubbed across her stomach bulge.

"Robin!" Vaike recoiled and snapped back into politician mode. "I….damn-it…ahhhh…let the record show, I am still very much opposed to—"

"Save it." Robin was finished with her prenatal check-up and on the move. She heard everything she needed to hear. "I'm going to impale your campaign."

Fuck Donald Trump. The rules don't apply to him. He can say and do things that would wipe out any other candidate, because he's coasting on celebrity.

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Are we really still six months out from the Iowa Caucuses? Come on Jeb…get your game together…